

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

28 February 2001

(extract from Book 1)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

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The Hon. D. V. NAPHTHINE

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The Hon. LOUISE ASHER

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Mr P. J. RYAN

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Mr B. E. H. STEGGALL

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Carli, Mr Carlo	Coburg	ALP	Mildenhall, Mr Bruce Allan	Footscray	ALP
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Davies, Ms Susan Margaret	Gippsland West	Ind	Nardella, Mr Donato Antonio	Melton	ALP
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Jasper, Mr Kenneth Stephen	Murray Valley	NP	Thompson, Mr Murray Hamilton	Sandringham	LP
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Langdon, Mr Craig Anthony Cuffe	Ivanhoe	ALP	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Wantima	LP
Languiller, Mr Telmo	Sunshine	ALP	Wilson, Mr Ronald Charles	Bennettswood	LP
Leigh, Mr Geoffrey Graeme	Mordialloc	LP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

¹ Resigned 3 November 1999

² Elected 11 December 1999

³ Resigned 12 April 2000

⁴ Elected 13 May 2000

CONTENTS

WEDNESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2001

PETITION	
<i>Village Glen, Rosebud</i>	37
BLF CUSTODIAN	
<i>50th report</i>	37
APPROPRIATION MESSAGE.....	37
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
<i>Business: taxes</i>	37
<i>Melton: broiler farms</i>	37
<i>Driver licences: testing</i>	38
<i>Norm Opie and Stewart Doyle</i>	38
<i>Drugs: Frankston strategy</i>	38
<i>Federal Express</i>	38
<i>Geelong: ring-road</i>	39
<i>George Said</i>	39
<i>Point Nepean: Norris Barracks</i>	39
<i>Camberwell Senior Citizens Association</i>	40
<i>Mount Waverley Secondary College</i>	40
CONDOLENCES	
<i>Sir Donald George Bradman, AC, KC</i>	40
GRIEVANCES	
<i>Business: taxes</i>	45
<i>Electricity: Basslink</i>	47
<i>Rail: Bendigo workshops</i>	49
<i>AWU: funds</i>	52
<i>Commonwealth–state financial relations</i>	55
<i>Gippsland: development</i>	57
<i>Police: prisoner accommodation</i>	59
<i>Member for Hawthorn: conflict of interest</i>	60
<i>Gaming: government policy</i>	61
<i>MAS: royal commission</i>	63
<i>Disability services: early intervention</i>	64
<i>Weeds: control</i>	66
<i>Legislative Council: reform</i>	68
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	
<i>Business: taxes</i>	69, 70, 73
<i>Commonwealth Business Forum</i>	69
<i>Barley: industry deregulation</i>	69
<i>Drugs: penalties</i>	70
<i>Hospitals: funding</i>	71
<i>Women’s and Children’s Health</i>	72
<i>Federation Square</i>	72
<i>Aged care: funding</i>	74
LIQUOR CONTROL REFORM (AMENDMENT) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	74
PROSTITUTION CONTROL (PROSCRIBED BROTHELS) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	74
CONSTITUTION (SUPREME COURT) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	75
WATER (AMENDMENT) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	75
POLICE REGULATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL	
<i>Second reading</i>	75, 88
<i>Committee</i>	105
<i>Remaining stages</i>	105
HEALTH SERVICES (AMENDMENT) BILL	
<i>Second reading</i>	75, 105
RACING AND BETTING ACTS (AMENDMENT) BILL	
<i>Second reading</i>	75
<i>Remaining stages</i>	88
ADJOURNMENT	
<i>Glenvale Road, Ringwood North: safety audit</i>	123
<i>Rural Victoria: sewerage</i>	124
<i>Ethnic communities: refugee support</i>	124
<i>Australian Formula One Grand Prix</i>	125
<i>CFA: volunteers</i>	125
<i>Marine pests and diseases</i>	126
<i>School buses: satellite phones</i>	126
<i>VET in Schools program</i>	126
<i>GST: stamp duty</i>	127
<i>Housing: recreational programs</i>	127
<i>McCrae Yacht Club</i>	128
<i>Chisholm Institute</i>	128
<i>Responses</i>	129

Wednesday, 28 February 2001

The SPEAKER (Hon. Alex Andrianopoulos) took the chair at 9.35 a.m. and read the prayer.

PETITION

The Clerk — I have received the following petition for presentation to Parliament:

Village Glen, Rosebud

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria sheweth:

The Village Glen has 600 residents and it is envisaged to expand to 1000 residents in 2004. Access to the Village Glen is via Eastbourne Road and is extremely dangerous to the elderly drivers and pedestrians trying to cross onto and over this very busy road. Vicroads have indicated that their studies reveal a need for traffic lights at this location but advise that there are no funds in their works program for these works.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the Minister for Transport support the residents of the Village Glen and provide the appropriate funding to install traffic lights at the entry to the Village Glen in Eastbourne Road, Rosebud.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr DIXON (Dromana) (496 signatures)

Laid on table.

BLF CUSTODIAN

50th report

The SPEAKER presented report given to him pursuant to section 7A of BLF (De-recognition) Act 1985 by the custodian appointed under section 7(1) of that act.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

APPROPRIATION MESSAGE

Message read recommending further appropriation for Health Services (Amendment) Bill.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Business: taxes

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I draw attention to yet another assault on small business by the Labor Party. Yesterday the Treasurer released a report on business taxes. It advocates a flat land tax rate of 2.89 per cent with no threshold on business properties. That would mean every small business and every small property investor would pay land tax. The current exemption is set at \$85 000. The government report admits that the number of people liable to pay land tax would double and further admits that the change follows a request from the big end of town. The report also admits that the beneficiaries of a change would be landowners with property portfolios valued at more than \$3.8 million and that builders and property developers would gain at the expense of small business.

I call on the Treasurer to get his mind off Nicole Kidman and onto small business. I call on him to rule out a \$1 billion tax grab from small business because such a change would be inequitable, outrageous and would impact on jobs. I call on the Treasurer to reduce state taxation, thereby defending small businesses that have already been slugged with increased Workcover premiums and the likely consequences of the Fair Employment Bill. The Treasurer now wants to slug all small businesses by imposing additional land tax bills of about \$1 billion when he should be reducing business taxes payable by them.

Melton: broiler farms

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — I bring to the attention of honourable members 227 signatures on a petition opposing the establishment of broiler farms in and around Rockbank. The wording of the petition is not appropriate for presentation to Parliament, but it is important that Parliament be informed of the feelings of my constituents in Rockbank because the establishment of the broiler farms would badly affect the health of many families.

Through the petition the residents of Melton have called upon the government, and specifically the Minister for Planning, to reject the establishment of all chicken broiler farms in the Shire of Melton as it would be an inappropriate industry for the area. They say it would prejudice the agreed future development plans of Melton for the following reasons: it would be detrimental for a declared tourist precinct; it would lead to foul smells, odours and hazardous dust, extra traffic pollution and further damage to existing road infrastructure; and it would attract extra unwanted

vermin such as snakes, rats, mice and foxes. The residents also say that Melton's theme of 'thoroughbred country' would be damaged if broiler farms were established and that the growth of Rockbank for proper development would be restricted. Also, it is possible that any farms may be established in proximity to schools.

A number of constituents have contacted me about this issue. The proposal to establish broiler farms in Melton, with the associated smell, is causing families to sell their homes and move from the area.

Driver licences: testing

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — A major concern for older country people is their ability to move freely within their communities. It is important for their independence that elderly people who live in their own homes continue to be able to drive motor vehicles. In general, country Victoria lacks good public transport, which adds to mobility difficulties for older people.

Recently increasing concerns have been raised about road safety for older people driving motor vehicles. A number of individuals and their families have suggested to me that Vicroads should be lenient when dealing with complaints about the licensing of older people. It is a sensitive issue. The appropriate road safety standards need to be balanced with the protection of an individual's rights.

I have been heartened by the response I have received to representations I made to Vicroads on this matter. A letter from the chief executive, Colin Jordan, dated 14 February states:

Vicroads is aware of the anxiety that can be caused by requiring older people to undergo a driving assessment. Accordingly, we have specialist testing officers to undertake these reassessments. These testing officers are instructed to treat all licence reassessments in a sensitive and sympathetic manner.

...

One of the outcomes of this assessment may be the issuing of a restricted licence, which will meet —

the needs of older people.

That policy would lead to a positive outcome for older people in country Victoria who need to maintain appropriate lifestyles. I support the policy of Vicroads on the issue.

Norm Opie and Stewart Doyle

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I recognise the enormous achievements by two well-known Footscray

residents, Mr Norm Opie and Mr Stewart Doyle, who have recently been recognised with Order of Australia medals in the Australia Day honours list. On any day on the streets of Footscray you would be likely to run into those two prominent residents.

Norm Opie has been prominent in the scouts for some 65 years and is the type of person who would be either cooking the chips at a large barbecue or driving the truck. Not only has Stewart Doyle been the manager of the Forge's store for 27 years but he is also a prominent fundraiser and cycling identity. He has called many international cycling races and is extremely well known in cycling circles. Both have made major contributions to the immediate and wider communities. Their honours in the Australia Day list were well deserved, and the community of Footscray similarly honours and recognises their major achievements.

Drugs: Frankston strategy

Ms McCALL (Frankston) — I direct the attention of the house to the current mayor of the City of Frankston. Members may be aware that the gentleman — I use the term loosely — is the Labor candidate for the federal seat of Dunkley, running against the wonderful Bruce Bellson, who is an eager, energetic and enthusiastic local member.

The mayor seems bent on coming up with twopenny-halfpenny solutions to the serious problem of drugs in our community. Those twopenny-halfpenny solutions have some impact, such as classical music being played in Young Street, Frankston. However, I am concerned about the \$400 fine incurred by heroin addicts dropping syringes in public. The failure to pay the fine will result in a four-day jail term, and that has been put in place without any reference to the local police as to whether it is a good idea. The Frankston lockup is currently filled to bursting point, like most of the lockups around Victoria. The current government seems unable to make a decision.

The final issue about which I have real concern is his needle exchange scheme where an addict gets a Chuppa Chup in exchange for a needle, the thought being that if an addict is chewing a Chuppa Chup he is not injecting. We should get real about the drug issue. The mayor of Frankston should not make up silly headline-grabbing issues because he thinks he will be a high-profile candidate in the federal election.

Federal Express

Mr LANGUILLER (Sunshine) — I was honoured to have been invited to open in the Sunshine electorate

the new station of Federal Express, the world's largest express transport company. The new facility reflects the increasing demand by Victorian business for air express services, and it is strategically located in Derrimut by the Western Ring Road. Fedex has come a long way from the early days of operation when it had several dozen employees with small aircraft delivering some 200 packages to 25 cities in the United States of America. Today Fedex has over 142 000 employees around the world, 40 000 vehicles, more than 600 aircraft and delivers more than 3 million packages each business day to more than 210 cities worldwide.

I was particularly excited about the new station because I had raised the need for an outer western suburbs transport strategy and sought a commitment from the Bracks government for the development of a transport infrastructure strategy. At the official opening I was more than happy to confirm that the Bracks government was developing a long-term strategy — to put it in Fedex jargon, 'a network of networks'. The people of the western suburbs welcome Fedex and look forward to a long-term partnership.

Geelong: ring-road

Mr PATERSON (South Barwon) — The residents of Wandana Heights and surrounding areas are concerned at the impact the proposed Geelong ring-road could have on their families. While the reservation has been in place for more than three decades, residential development has been allowed right up to its boundary. The government is conducting a review of the ring-road options, but residents have been kept in the dark about how they can be involved in the process.

Following a recent newspaper article which quoted a member for Geelong Province in the other place, Mrs Elaine Carbines, the residents association was forced to issue a statement saying that Mrs Carbines had her facts around the wrong way and questioned her account to the media of a public meeting called to discuss the issue.

The review will look at the options for both the western and eastern ring-roads. It is hoped the eastern option will be examined seriously. That would include a bridge over Corio Bay with traffic then able to access the city, the Bellarine Peninsula, the Surf Coast and western Victoria.

A version of the western option may be required to take traffic between the Princes Highway north of Geelong around to the Hamilton Highway. I wish the residents

well in their campaign. I will be doing my best to ensure their voice is heard.

George Said

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — In this International Year of Volunteers I place on record the name of a volunteer working in my office and in the electorates of Keilor and St Albans. His name is George Said. George has worked voluntarily at the St Albans East Primary School for many years, maintaining the gardens, cleaning and doing repairs to and maintenance on furniture and equipment. Many volunteers receive honours or awards and are recognised publicly. George is one of those people who just get on with the job quietly without expecting a big fuss to be made of their efforts.

George participated in the creation of a float for the Moomba procession on behalf of the St Albans community. He has worked in my electorate office as a volunteer for as long as I have been a member of Parliament, during which time, despite two bypass operations, he has continued to turn up for work. George helps anybody in the community, whatever the needs are — whether catering for a fundraiser or just helping out at a charity barbecue — and will work on quietly without expecting any acknowledgment.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Point Nepean: Norris Barracks

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — I raise a matter I have raised in this place twice before, first in November 1999 and again in November last year, regarding the former army land that includes the Norris Barracks at Point Nepean, near Portsea. It is a historic and unique site and is important to all Victorians. It has hectares of natural bushland and includes the unique former quarantine station, a museum and historic army buildings, all in a magnificent setting on Port Phillip Bay. The previous government conducted various studies of the site, including flora and fauna, heritage and infrastructure studies as required. The commonwealth government is keen to rid itself of the land and hand it over to the state. It is also very keen to pay all the rehabilitation costs.

While the minister is fiddling and procrastinating the site is deteriorating rapidly because of its high exposure to the maritime climate. I would like someone in the government to do something about it. Perhaps the Minister for Major Projects and Tourism, who knows how to get things done, with the exception of the

western shard, could move in and do something about the land. The site is important not only for tourism but also to the history of Victoria and Australia. It is a unique location.

Camberwell Senior Citizens Association

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I rise to pay tribute to the Camberwell Senior Citizens Association. I have attended its centre on a number of occasions, most recently at Christmas, when close to a hundred people had a delightful lunch.

The association is ably led by Debbie Kay, its president, and by Tony and Giovanna Trivisonno, who are treasurer and secretary respectively.

With the assistance of the Boroondara City Council, last year I was pleased to be able to help the association get a bus and tram shelter installed at the front of its building. In addition, I lobbied successfully on its behalf for a new autoclave for the popular podiatry service at the centre. The autoclave was officially opened — if that is what you do with autoclaves — at the Christmas party. I pass on the thanks of all the members of the Camberwell Senior Citizens Association to the Minister for Health.

I wish the members of the association all the best. I know they have a great time there. Tony Trivisonno is quoted in the local paper as saying:

We all get along well. It's a beautiful club and language is no barrier.

Mount Waverley Secondary College

Mr WILSON (Bennettswood) — I place on record my congratulations to Mount Waverley Secondary College on the outstanding success of its students in last year's Victorian certificate of education. Mount Waverley Secondary College, in the heart of the electorate of Bennettswood, has a reputation throughout Melbourne's eastern suburbs, and indeed Victoria, for its outstanding educational standards.

The SPEAKER — Order! The time set down for members statements has expired.

CONDOLENCES

Sir Donald George Bradman, AC, KC

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of Sir Donald Bradman, and places on record its acknowledgment of the inspiring contribution made by him to

Australian and international cricket as an Australian sporting legend and extends its condolences to the Bradman family.

As all Australians and most of the world know, this week Australia lost a hero. Our greatest living sportsman has left us and we are today a poorer nation for his death.

In this year of the centenary of Federation Australians are looking to their history to celebrate those who have made us proud and who have defined us as Australians. Sir Donald Bradman was one such Australian who, in times of adversity, made Australians believe they could achieve what other nationalities could not.

His profound impact on the national spirit at a time of world conflict and economic depression will stand as a lasting legacy for centuries to come. The English historian, Charles Williams, summed it up when he wrote in one of the biographies of Sir Donald:

Those who lived through the period say, with the ring of absolute truth, that they will never forget the sense of hope and confidence that Bradman symbolised.

Not only did Sir Donald demonstrate what Australia could achieve on the sporting field but he also represented the dream of a child from country Australia achieving at the highest level on the international arena. The boy from Bowral epitomised everything that is great about sport — that is, triumph over adversity, exquisite skills and, above all else, that great enduring quality of impeccable sportsmanship. It epitomised Sir Donald Bradman. One hopes that quality is imbued in every young sportsperson throughout Australia.

The mystique that surrounded Sir Donald stemmed from his performances on and off the cricket field. On the field he achieved what no other batsmen has ever come close to achieving. When Australians were taught about the history of cricket they were told of the famous day when Sir Donald strode to the crease needing a mere four runs to achieve the perfect batting average of 100. With a sense of tragedy he walked from the field to a standing ovation, having been bowled for a duck. As he retired with the remarkable batting average of 99.94 — an incredible feat that had never been achieved and is unlikely ever to be achieved again — Australians were reminded that although the Don was a great sportsman and Australian, he was human after all. The rumours at the time were that his failure to score a run — the duck — was caused by the enormous emotion surrounding his farewell appearance at the crease, but Sir Donald dispelled that rumour when, in his normal forthright manner, he said:

Some people said I got out because I had tears in my eyes. Of course that's rubbish.

The real story, though, was in how he achieved that 99.94 batting average. Sir Donald had a cricketing career that spanned two decades; he played 80 test matches, 338 first-class games and 331 second-class games. During those two decades Sir Donald terrorised the English cricket team when he scored a staggering 5028 runs at an average of 89; an extraordinary record against the English cricket team. In his second Ashes series against England Sir Donald again dominated the English team, scoring a staggering 974 runs, including four 100s, at the remarkable average of 139.

During the depths of the Depression Sir Donald's performances transformed the front pages of the newspapers from carrying stories of doom to news of optimism, hope and triumph.

In 1932, when faced with another season of being humiliated by the Don, the English team began another chapter in the Ashes rivalry by adopting tactics that came to be known as bodyline. Harold Larwood, acting on the orders of his captain, bowled at Australia's hero and the remainder of the Australian cricket team with the aim of intimidating and injuring its players.

It is interesting to note that the Don's average for that series was lower than at any other time of his test career, yet he still achieved a staggering average of 56.57, which was significantly below the average he achieved during the remainder of his career despite the bodyline tactics that the English adopted.

In hindsight, I believe it is possible that the main reason Sir Donald did not reach the 100 average was the tactics of the English team in the Bodyline series — certainly not his last innings.

In the twilight of his career Sir Don chose to go to England despite his poor health. At the age of 39 he went to England in a series that was terribly important to both nations following the war. As a rival cricketer said:

I have forever respected him for coming to England in 1948, when he wasn't well and he might have retired, but he came because it was the best thing for the game.

That was always at the forefront of Sir Donald's mind. Clearly, Sir Don has always acted in the best interests of the game.

Off the field Sir Donald demonstrated a modesty and commitment that reinforced the integrity and character of the man. In retirement he continued to teach the next generation of Australian cricketers about their responsibility to the game. The most important example of this occurred in the early 1990s, when he told the

Australian cricket team — instructive and important for the future — that:

You do not own cricket. You are the custodians of the game.

A telling statement, given the current controversy surrounding cricket.

A successful stockbroker and a loving husband to his beloved wife, Lady Bradman, Sir Donald relished his family life. When Lady Bradman died in 1997 all Australians were touched by his short, simple statement. He said:

She's the most marvellous woman that's ever existed.

Sir Donald was also famous for the enormous amount of time he spent writing to the thousands of Australians who wrote to him. I have told the story of my own son, who collects signatures from famous sporting people, who four years ago sent a letter addressed to Sir Donald Bradman to the Adelaide Cricket Club — we thought it should be sent there although we did not know exactly where to send it — and it was forwarded on to Sir Donald. It was a time when I was not a known person, and certainly Nick would not have been a known person, but a week later a signature came back from Sir Donald on his letterhead, which my son now has at the front of his autograph book. There are thousands of those stories around Australia of boys and girls who have collected his signature. The record shows that in the time since his retirement from the cricket field Sir Don has written almost a million letters.

In later years Sir Don graciously left the media spotlight and the public clamour that has always surrounded him. The way he handled himself in life reflected the great integrity he demonstrated as a sportsman. In death he again demonstrated his fierce commitment to privacy and family. I urge all Victorians to take time to reflect on what Sir Don means for them, our history and our nation, particularly in this year that celebrates the centenary of Federation. He is one of the best Australian examples: a great Australian hero.

I urge Victorians to record their names in the condolence books on offer at Australia Post outlets and offices. The tributes recorded will be a remarkable historical record of the esteem in which Sir Donald is held by Victorians and Australians.

The game of cricket was irrevocably changed for the better by Sir Donald, both as a player and as an administrator, and it is significantly poorer for his passing. On behalf of all Victorians I would like to extend my deepest sympathy to Sir Donald's family

and his many friends throughout Australia and the world.

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — It is with a degree of pride and some regret that I second the motion before the house today to recognise the passing of Sir Donald Bradman.

Sir Donald Bradman was simply the greatest cricketer ever to have played the game. His record is head and shoulders above the record of any other cricketer that has ever walked on any cricket field anywhere in the world. His average of 99.94 stands as testament to his great skill, his enormous ability and his deep commitment to excellence. As I said, Sir Donald was clearly the best cricketer ever to have played the game.

He has made an enormous contribution not only on the field but off the field in his administration of cricket, in his inspiration to a nation and in the great esteem in which he is held in the world of cricket, in sport generally and in every walk of life throughout the world.

Cricketers from Portland to Port Melbourne may well play a whole cricketing career without having hit a century, yet with only four more runs Don Bradman would have walked away from a test cricketing career spanning a number of years with an average of 100 runs — unbelievable in the cricketing world. When you look at the great cricketers who have played the game through the history of test cricket you realise that none come within cooee of Sir Don's performance on the field.

It is evident that Sir Donald's commitment to the game started at an early age. Stories known to be true tell of Sir Don in his youth learning how to play cricket and developing that phenomenal hand-eye coordination that he became famous for and of the way he developed his cricketing skills using a single stump and a golf ball against a tank stand at his home in Bowral. He not only hit the ball against a tank stand but he often hit it against the corrugations in the iron tank just to give the golf ball, which was coming at enormous speed anyway, a few variations in bounce and direction so that he could learn to respond quickly.

For hours at a time he practised his fielding by throwing a ball against a fence and trying to hit the painted stumps on the fence. At a time when fielding was not seen as a skill that cricketers needed but as the part of the game between batting and bowling, here was a boy practising his fielding and developing those skills.

Such was the talent and technique of Sir Don Bradman that if he had not pursued a career in cricket he could

just as easily have played tennis at the highest level across the world and represented Australia in the Davis Cup. He could have been a golfing or squash champion or could have taken up any one of many sports. Sir Don was also an accomplished pianist, and some say he could have been an international concert pianist had he chosen that career direction.

But it was on the cricketing field that Sir Don inspired and delighted the Australian nation. While he pleased Australians and fans around the world, sometimes Victorians were on the receiving end of his great skills. When Sir Don came to the MCG sometimes he was a hero as a player and captain for Australia, but sometimes he came here as a bit of a villain, playing for New South Wales or South Australia. Once in 1932–33 he smashed 157 for New South Wales against Victoria, and the Victorians were not too thrilled about that performance. Twelve months later he scored 187 not out against the Victorians. When playing for South Australia, one day he hit 357 runs against the Victorians and followed it up with 192, 107 and 267 in his next three visits to the MCG for state matches. So although Sir Don was a great Australian cricketer, at times Victorians were at the receiving end of his brilliance.

Victorians will mostly treasure Sir Don for his performances at the MCG when he was playing for Australia. Sir Don Bradman played 11 test matches at the famous MCG and scored 1671 test runs with an average of almost 130. That average is an unbelievable record considering that the 11 test matches were held over a number of years and were interrupted by the Second World War.

It is clear from any of the figures one looks at — Don Bradman's test record, his state record and any aspect of his cricketing record — that he was an outstanding cricketer. But Sir Don was more than that: he was an absolute inspiration to the nation at a time when it was facing a number of challenges.

When the English players developed a bowling strategy to attack the body of batsmen during the Bodyline era it was fundamentally aimed at restricting the brilliance of the Australian batsmen, including Sir Donald Bradman. Sir Don led the counterattack from the Australian team and, as the Premier said, averaged over 56 runs in the series, despite the attack at the body by the English bowlers at the direction of the English captain, which caused enormous division between Australia and England at the time. That was one of the earliest occasions on which Sir Don represented inspiration and leadership for the people of Australia.

During the Depression years many people were looking for some relief from the ongoing drudgery of the enormous economic hardship being experienced across Victoria and Australia, and many sought relief by watching Sir Donald Bradman perform or listening to his feats on the radio. There was a lot of tragedy in this country and across the world during those years, and one of the bright lights and beacons of hope for the future was the performance of Sir Don Bradman and the Australian cricket team. Once again Sir Donald Bradman was an icon, a leader and an inspiration for the nation.

Similarly during the war years, when the nations of the world were racked and divided by war, Sir Don Bradman was an important figure in the Australian community. In 1948, during the post-war recovery, the Australian team that Bradman took to England, which became known as the Invincibles, had a major influence on the psyche of the world and of the commonwealth as it then was, in particular. The team inspired Australians and helped to revitalise the people of England by getting them refocused on the process of enjoying and rebuilding their lives. The 1948 cricket tour by the Invincibles was a significant factor in that recovery, and Sir Donald Bradman's leadership played an important role.

Many other aspects of Sir Don's life are worthy of comment. In addition to being remembered for his outstanding cricketing feats, Sir Don will be well remembered for always having had time for children. He always had a kind word for children in the crowd and a positive comment to encourage people to pursue excellence in whatever career they followed. Sir Don always had time to help young cricketers develop their technique and to encourage their love and understanding of the game.

Sir Donald was a great administrator as well as a great cricketer. For many years he was a selector for the Australian team and chairman of the Australian Cricket Board. He was a great contributor to the development of cricket in many countries around the world.

One of the most important things that Sir Don leaves us with is the knowledge that he played the game in the spirit in which it was intended to be played. In recent years when the game of cricket has been racked by problems with gambling and when the integrity of players has been questioned, many people have looked to Sir Donald Bradman as someone who played cricket in the true spirit of the game. He played it hard, he played it fair, and he played it in that great tradition of what cricket and sport should be about.

The greatest legacy that Sir Don leaves us is his integrity. That is what he will be remembered for.

Anyone judging the last century would say that Sir Donald Bradman was the greatest sportsman to come out of Australia in that time, and indeed one of the greatest Australians of the last century. Sir Don has left us that enormous legacy.

I pass on my sympathy and the sympathy of the Liberal Party to Sir Don's family and to his many fans and supporters in Victoria, Australia and across the world.

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — Sir Donald Bradman will be recorded in Australia's history as the nation's greatest sportsman. The term 'unique' is appropriate to this man, because in sporting terms that is what he was; he was the very best of the best. Although comparisons are said to be odious, it is remarkable to observe from the discussion taking place on the occasion of his passing how many elements of our community have been touched by Sir Donald Bradman's contribution to Australia.

Only two nights ago after leaving this place I went to the local 7 Eleven store where I became engaged in conversation with the delightful Indian gentleman who runs it and a lady customer who was also there to buy some goods. As we were discussing the passing of Sir Don she raised the comparison between Mohammed Ali's contribution to boxing and Sir Donald Bradman's contribution to cricket. I love sports of all kinds, and I said to her that I did not believe that comparison could validly be made. While Ali was a great boxer and a fantastic athlete, the truth is that Sir Donald Bradman was the very best of the very best. The measure of his status lies in the fact that in a sense the rules were changed to accommodate the man and what he had done for the game.

The closest comparison I can make is Walter Lindrum's contribution to the game of billiards, the rules for which were changed because of his dominance. Similarly, the rules of cricket were in a sense changed in 1932 during the Bodyline era because the English cricketers were fearful that Don Bradman was such a dominant force that he would kill the game in England. They were worried that unless something was done about him he would render the end of the game on English soil. So it was that Douglas Jardine, the then English captain, instructed Harold Larwood to bowl at the body and head of the batsman on the basis that if they could not get him out they would knock him out! By that mechanism Donald Bradman brought about a change not in the written rules but rather in the

practices of the game, which were altered because of Don Bradman's being such a dominant figure.

Despite all that pressure he withstood the attack, and, as has been remarked, he kept up an average for that year of 56.57 runs as compared with his average of 99.94 when he finished playing the game. It was a remarkable achievement.

Sir Don had a magnificent eye. Relatively speaking, he was a man of small stature, like the other great batsmen of the modern generation — the Gavaskars, the Allan Borders and the Tendulkars. The batsmen who play at first and second drop in cricketing teams are usually of small stature, and in time to come fellows like Ricky Ponting will be of a similar ilk.

Sir Donald brought to the game the sort of attributes that were appropriate for its needs at the time. He played the game in a manner that best displayed his many physical abilities: he could play every shot; he was agile and light on his feet; and he was an imposing presence when he came to the wicket — his just walking out there was enough to instil fear into opposition teams!

Sir Don was a statistician's delight. He did not make runs — he amassed them, and he loved it! He took great pleasure in destroying bowlers. He loved bringing fast bowlers to their knees, and one of his great pleasures in cricket was being able to take the fastest of the fast and belittle them.

As a captain, Sir Don was courageous. He captained the Invincibles in 1948 and set great standards. He had great respect for his opposition teams. He would not permit sledging, and although he did not have to accommodate stump-cam it is interesting to observe his comments on the notion of sledging and its entrance into the game over the past few years.

As a player Sir Don was ruthless. He made runs whenever and wherever he could, on pitches that were prepared without the sort of careful attention given to them in today's world. Jack Ryder was once asked about the basis for Bradman's being able to score as he did, and he said, 'Well, he just belts the hell out of every ball he can reach'. It was a pretty simple process that he applied.

Sir Don was revered in English cricket circles, as he was in Australia. It must be remembered that in his day the tours of England went for eight months at a time. Following one of his extraordinary innings during which the English players despaired of ever being able to dismiss him, when they did get him out the flyer for the tabloids displayed outside shops read simply, 'He's

out!', and the world knew precisely to whom reference was being made.

Even though his feats on the field were remarkable and incredible by any standard, what he was able to achieve off the field will be the true measure of Sir Donald's legacy in years to come. It must be remembered that he was at the peak of his abilities during the Depression and for a nation of people who did not have hope otherwise, he represented hope. Over the past few nights I am sure we have all seen on television the grainy black-and-white film of the Don batting. One of the most astounding aspects of his story is the way crowds went to grounds simply because he would walk through the gate and out to bat. He provided inspiration for the nation at a time when Australia was in deep financial trouble and the Depression was at its worst. That is one of the great legacies of the man.

Apparently Sir Donald was shy. I say that never having had the honour of meeting him. The closest the Ryan clan ever came to meeting Sir Donald was when my Uncle Jack, who still lives in Brisbane, was a cab driver and had the pleasure one day of driving him to the ground for a test match. He has often recounted to me the conversation he had with the great man. In those days cricket players were paid £25 for a test match and did not receive the sort of money that is involved in the game now. However, Sir Donald often said he would have been thrilled to play the game simply for the challenge of it and for the privilege of being able to represent his country.

At one point the English counties put together a contract for Sir Donald to play in England for a season. They were going to pay him £750 but he refused the offer. Instead, a group of Australian organisations came together and proposed an arrangement of a similar ilk and Sir Donald stayed in Australia.

He was in his 30s during the Depression years and it is fair to say he had the expectations of a nation on his shoulders every time he went out to bat. People loved and idolised the man, yet a feature of his character was that he shunned the adulation, not only when he was a star batsman and an ornament to the game but also in subsequent years. By the same token he was an egalitarian individual. Sir Donald could talk to people on their own ground on the issues that mattered to them. As the Premier has indicated through his son's experience, Sir Donald was always happy to do what he could to enable people to share in the great aura that had been built up around him over the years.

Sir Donald Bradman performed sporting feats which had never before been seen in this nation and which I

believe will never be seen again. That was one of the big statements being made about the man at that time and I think it was true. He was a great sportsman by any standard.

In addition, he will surely be recorded in Australia's history as one of our greatest citizens. Sir Donald made a contribution well beyond the cricket grounds he dominated for all those years. He contributed much to community life. He was a great administrator in the game of cricket and outside it. He was always willing to lend a hand where he could. I was reading with interest the commentary by Graham Yallop, who had the unenviable task of taking over the leadership of the Australian cricket team after the Packer era and the great changes in the game 20 years ago. Graham Yallop was given much encouragement by Sir Donald, who had a great belief in the game and considered that the players of the day were the custodians of it.

Sir Donald has left a wonderful legacy to all Australians, and of course it is not confined to our shores. The outpouring of commentary we have seen from around the world is testament to the fact that Sir Donald Bradman was one of the great sporting icons of Australia and will be remembered as the person who made the greatest sporting contribution to this nation. He will be regarded forever as one of our greatest citizens. I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in this condolence motion, and offer the sympathies of the National Party to Sir Donald's family.

Motion agreed to in silence, honourable members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

GRIEVANCES

The SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Business: taxes

Dr NAPTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — Today I grieve for the 277 000 small businesses across Victoria that will be hit to leg by the Labor Party's new land tax proposals.

Mr Nardella — You are hopeless.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Melton.

Dr NAPTHINE — I am appalled that the honourable member for Melton interjects when he is

part of a party that will impose land tax on every small business in the main street of Melton and when the beneficiaries of the land tax proposal will be multinational insurance companies and property developers. That is what the honourable member for Melton and the Treasurer are supporting. That is what the report on state business taxes is about. The honourable member for Melton wants to take land tax from the milk bar and video shop operators and all the other family and small businesses in Melton and give it to multinational property developers.

If that is what the honourable member for Melton is about and if that is what he stands for, let him say so. If the honourable member for Melton is opposed to that principle, as I am, he should tell the Treasurer to immediately rule out the iniquitous proposal put forward in the Treasurer's tax reform package. Honourable members have only to look at the words of the tax reform package put forward by the Treasury and released by the Treasurer yesterday in the Labor Party's report.

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — If the Minister for Police and Emergency Services wants to disassociate himself from the report, let him stand up and say so. Do you associate yourself with this report?

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition will address his remarks through the Chair.

Dr NAPTHINE — If the Minister for Police and Emergency Services thinks the report is wrong, let him say so. If the Premier says the report is wrong, let him immediately rule out any proposals for imposing land tax on small businesses right across Victoria. Let them come out and give small business an assurance that land taxes will not be imposed on their businesses.

Interestingly the Treasurer has already commented on some of the recommendations in the report and ruled out some of them. He has said the government does not accept some of the recommendations and that they will not apply. By implication, therefore, the Treasurer has said he accepts the land tax recommendation. If he does not, let him rule it out. The Treasurer should say that the government will not be imposing new land taxes on 277 000 small businesses across Victoria. If that is what the government believes, let its members come in here and say it. This report says that there will be a new flat rate of tax of 2.89 per cent and that:

... revenue collected from land tax would increase from around \$475.4 million in 2000–01 to \$1.57 billion in 2001–02.

That means more than \$1 billion in land tax would be collected under the proposals of this government!

An Honourable Member — And no threshold.

Dr NAPTHINE — The report makes it clear that currently there are 130 197 Victorian land tax payers. It further states:

Abolishing the existing threshold —

which is suggested —

and maintaining the current exemptions could potentially increase the number of taxpayers to around 377 000 by 2002, including about 240 000 with property holdings worth less than \$85 000.

Some 240 000 Victorian small business operators — that is, the milk bar in Seymour, the video shop in Melton, the small businesses in Oakleigh, Morwell and Mitcham, and the family supermarket in Dandenong are among the small businesses that the Labor Party wants to include in the land tax net.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The house will come to order.

Dr NAPTHINE — The proposal does not apply only to the 240 000 small businesses. The report continues:

Allowing for a large proportion of these properties being eligible for a principal place of residence exemption and a further group being non-income earning residential properties subject to tax at the old progressive rate scale, the number of taxpayers in the new flat rate land tax category could be about 277 000

The government wants to increase the number of land tax payers to 277 000! More than 250 000 Victorian land tax payers will be subject to the change proposed by the Bracks government, which neither understands nor cares about small businesses.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — If the honourable member for Melton wants to reject the proposal he should stand up in the grievance debate and say that the Labor Party rejects the proposal. He should tell the Treasurer that he rejects the proposal. If the Treasurer, the Premier and the honourable member for Melton are silent on the proposal one can only assume they support it. Small business operators in Victoria will be hit for six over the issue. The report continues:

There would be an increase in tax for most landowners with aggregate holdings of less than \$3.87 million.

Who will be the losers under the proposal? The small businesses in Orbost, Benalla, Ballarat and Bacchus Marsh will be the losers. Who will be the winners under this Labor-endorsed proposal? None other than those people who own properties worth more than \$3.87 million — the multimillionaire property owners. The report states:

In particular, landowners with aggregate holdings of less than \$1 million represent 90 per cent of taxpayers but currently pay only 10 per cent of the tax. Under the present scenario, this group would represent 98 per cent of taxpayers and pay about 70 per cent of the land tax revenue.

... Property owners with high value property holdings who conduct a large number of transactions would be expected to benefit — for example, builders and property developers.

Other people to benefit would be property trusts, property speculators and multinational life insurance companies. The people who will be hit with new land tax charges are the little people — small business operators and independent retirees — who own properties that they rent out for small incomes.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — It is all right for the former secretary of the state Labor Party, the former bagman for the Labor Party, to interject. He should stand up in the grievance debate for his small businesses and say that the Labor Party will reject the proposal. The honourable member for Dandenong North is an influential man in the Labor Party — both a king-maker and decision-maker in the Labor Party.

Let us examine some examples. A milk bar in Sydney Street, Seymour, which I think honourable members all know, with an unimproved land value of \$41 000 — —

Mr Hardman — Seymour or Kilmore?

Dr NAPTHINE — Sorry, Kilmore. Also consider a milk bar in Station Street, Seymour, with an unimproved land value of \$41 000 that currently pays zero land tax. Under the proposal of the Labor Party the owners will be up for land tax of \$1 185 each and every year. I hope the honourable member for Seymour tells the people in Sydney and Station streets what he will do to their land tax bills.

A person who owns a takeaway food shop in Sturt Street, Ballarat, with an unimproved land value of \$153 000 currently pays land tax of \$153. Under the Labor Party proposal that person will pay \$4421. A family supermarket in the central business district of a regional area such as Mildura with a current unimproved value of \$354 000 currently pays \$508 in

land tax each year. Under the new proposal the land tax will increase to \$10 231.

The beneficiaries are property speculators and developers and multinational insurance companies. The Labor Party wants to take money from small investors and small businesses and give it to the multinational property speculators. That is the Labor Party philosophy.

It is part of the triple whammy for small businesses under the Bracks government. They have been hit for six by massive Workcover increases, they will again be hit for six by the unfair employment bill, and they will be hit out of the ground by the land tax proposals. It does not matter whether a person is a small business operator in Cann River, whether a person runs a service station in Castlemaine, or whether a person is a private retiree with a small property investment, under this proposal they will all be paying land tax.

I urge the Premier and the Treasurer to totally repudiate the proposal. I ask that they come into the house and say that the Labor Party will not introduce those land tax changes and will not put this land tax impost on Victorian small businesses. Small businesses are the heart of employment and economic growth of Victoria. They are the mainstays of country Victoria and they deserve the fair go they are not receiving under the Bracks Labor government, which neither understands nor cares about small business.

Electricity: Basslink

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — I grieve for Gippslanders about the Basslink project, which has the staggers. The government must demonstrate leadership if the project is to proceed. It must stop hiding behind the notion of process. Yesterday in question time when I asked the Premier about the project, he responded by hiding behind the shroud of process.

Even though it is not accustomed to doing so, the government needs to show some leadership in the interests of the many people in Gippsland who will be affected by the project if it proceeds and those associated with its supposed development.

I know that you, Mr Acting Speaker, will be interested in a number of issues surrounding the matter, the first being the pylons. The people of Gippsland do not want pylons because each one would be 45 metres high — as a benchmark, that is the height of the Great Southern Stand at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The lines would span about 60 kilometres with each pylon placed about 300 metres apart. It is proposed that more than

200 such structures would be constructed over the Gippsland landscape. Therefore, for obvious and understandable reasons, the public at large have said they do not want the pylons associated with the development of the project. Over past months there has been a hardening of that attitude and the strong community view is now developing that there should be no Basslink project at all.

From the outset I have supported the basic notion of the project on the basis that it would not incorporate pylons. Strong advocates on the matter in the community, such as Rosemary Irving, have taken a similar position. However, a stronger voice is developing in the community that there should be no Basslink at all. The government needs to take some leadership and do something about the matter before community attitude hardens to the point where the project cannot proceed.

Many on-land issues are associated with the proposal. It is intended that the powerlines cross many farms and a lot of public land; it is also intended that old technology be used. The building of pylons is still being talked about at a time when two other major Australian projects — Murraylink and Directlink — involve the laying underground of literally hundreds of kilometres of cable to provide a power supply. It was decided that the construction of pylons was not necessary for those projects.

It has been said, with justification, that existing technology will not enable the carriage of the power intended to be passed through Basslink. The Murraylink and Directlink projects will involve the transmission of up to only 300 megawatts of power whereas it is contemplated that Basslink will transmit 500 megawatts. The other projects I mentioned have been operating since only about 1996–97 yet already they have the capacity to carry substantial amounts of power. If the project proceeds in Gippsland as per the current intention of the National Grid Company, which is building and developing the Basslink project, the community will be stuck with the blasted pylons for the next 40 years!

If the project is to proceed the government should ensure that the appropriate technology is used during the construction phase. During past years people in the area have already suffered as a result of drought and the ravages of ovine Johne's disease as well as in various other ways; they simply do not need this problem. In addition to everything else is the sheer aesthetic impact the building of such structures would have on some of the loveliest landscapes in Gippsland. For the reasons I

have outlined, we do not want pylons stretched across the countryside.

Issues associated with marine life must be considered; I do not believe the Basslink community consultative committee has been able to come to grips with them. An extensive area of reef lies offshore — how will the cable be laid through that reef area and across Bass Strait without causing significant damage? Fishing issues are also involved. Many commercial and recreational fishers are very concerned that the laying of the cable will substantially damage their capacity to fish. I do not believe biodiversity and the need to preserve the marine environment have been properly explored by the consultative committee. Already the Environment Conservation Council, based a relatively short distance away in South Gippsland, is making all sorts of recommendations that will shut down the commercial or recreational use of the waters as the Basslink project has the prospect of causing more damage to the fragile environment. I do not believe the consultative process now under way is accommodating those concerns.

The conflict within the government is also relevant. National Grid, the proponent for the project, maintains that it will benefit Victoria, but there is no doubt that its fundamental intent is to benefit Tasmania; I will return to that point in a moment. The interesting question is, 'What is the government's view?'. I have grave concerns about the project. On the one hand, when I asked the Premier yesterday whether benefits would derive from Basslink to Victoria he replied that there would be benefits. On the other hand, when I asked the same question of the Minister for State and Regional Development during the last sessional period he disclaimed the project as having any benefit for Victoria and said that it was a Tasmanian project. He said that there was nothing in it for Victorians — a statement he reiterated in an interview on 30 January on ABC radio. Even worse, in the course of the interview he demonstrated that he simply does not understand the project. In response to a caller, after some preamble about it being a Tasmanian project, he is reported to have said:

... And it's initiated by the Tasmanian government, who are desperate to sell more of their hydro-electric power to the mainland states. So they are the project proponent.

He simply does not understand that the whole notion of the Basslink project is to enable Tasmania to be brought into the national grid so that it can supplement its power supplies when the hydro-electric system on which it presently relies cannot be depended upon. The whole notion of the project is to permit Tasmania to have extra supplies available to it — not the other way around, as

the Minister for State and Regional Development thinks.

The Premier has acknowledged that there is a capacity, as the proponents say, for the transfer back to Victoria of any excess power that Tasmanians may have available in those instances where Victoria has a need. However, this Minister for State and Regional Development has disclaimed that as being a prospective benefit for Victoria in the face of not only the view put by National Grid, the developers, but also, and perhaps more importantly, that expressed by Nemmco, the controlling authority. I am concerned that there is an obvious conflict in government about its understanding of the significance of the project let alone about what should flow — particularly if, as the Premier admitted yesterday, potential benefits flow to Victoria from the operation of a completed project.

For the moment I will proceed on the basis that the Premier is correct and that the Minister for State and Regional Development is wrong. I will presume that there is the potential for Victoria to derive benefits from the project. One of the problems the Minister for State and Regional Development has, and one of the reasons he is steadfastly refusing to acknowledge what everybody else acknowledges, is his concern that he will have to get into the government's piggy bank and provide financial assistance to enable the project to proceed in a way that is fair to Gippslanders.

On one hand the Minister for State and Regional Development is quite happy for the Department of Treasury and Finance to kick in an extra \$71 million so that part of the Eastern Freeway extension includes the construction of tunnels thereby protecting the environment, but on the other hand, he disclaims the Basslink project when Gippslanders ask for equitable treatment. He knows that if he acknowledges the project has benefits for Victoria, as the Premier has done, he will be under increased pressure to get out and do what this government proclaims it is here for — that is, to govern for all Victorians.

People in Gippsland are worried sick and stuck on the skewer over the development of the project. The Minister for State and Regional Development firstly does not understand the project and secondly is desperate to disclaim any potential benefit to Victoria. He does not understand the project and he is worried that if Victoria is seen as benefiting from it he will have to find the money to give people the assistance they richly deserve.

There is a conflict within government, which is aided and abetted by the position taken by the Minister for

Agriculture. I have attended functions at which the minister has stood on the podium and said to the gathered throng, 'This project cannot proceed with the use of pylons'. I have heard him say it!

It has been recorded as a statement by him! I see the honourable member for Narracan is in the chamber. What does he say about this project, Mr Acting Speaker? Here is his chance. Why doesn't he get up and say by way of interjection that he supports the people of Gippsland, that he is happy to have the project proceed, but not on the basis of the use of pylons? Why doesn't the honourable member for Narracan use this opportunity? Here is his chance. Why doesn't he get up on his feet and say it?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order!

The Leader of the National Party should not invite interjections across the chamber.

Mr RYAN — Let the record show that in the face of my invitation across this chamber the honourable member for Narracan, a Labor Party member, sat mute and would not make the commitment I believe his government should make. How can an individual come into the chamber and profess to represent the interests of Gippslanders when he will not even stand up in this forum and tell them he is prepared to support them? The honourable member is as weak as water, like the rest of the government to which he belongs.

At least the Minister for Agriculture is on the record as saying that he does not want this project built on pylons. It will be interesting to see whether the promise the minister made leading up to the election, as was the case with many others, is fulfilled. In due course the house will hear from the honourable member for Narracan on the topic.

Given the context of other developments around Australia, there is the issue of whether the project is necessary at all. As you are probably aware, Mr Acting Speaker, Tasmania has three prospective power supply options.

Firstly, the existing hydro-electric system is patently deficient. In years when there is insufficient water the system cannot be operated to the full and business cannot get a reliable supply of energy. As a result existing businesses are struggling and new businesses cannot be attracted to the state. It is necessary to supplement the system.

There are two other options, of which Basslink is one. An extra 500 megawatts of power will be available if it is possible for Tasmania to be linked to the grid. I have

outlined the details of that concept. That is the second prospective source of power supply.

The third option is pertinent to the debate because Duke Energy International has entered into heads of agreement with the Tasmanian government to build a pipeline to take gas from the Longford gas fields, just off the magnificent Gippsland coast, across to Tasmania. Under the heading 'Duke Energy Board approves capital for Tasmanian gas pipeline', issue 2 of February 2001 of the *Pipelinereport* published by Duke Energy International, states:

Duke Energy International announced in November that it had secured Duke Energy Board approval and identified the customer base to support the \$400 million Tasmanian gas pipeline.

Construction will start in the second half of 2001, pending finalisation of environmental, licensing and regulatory approvals.

The article then refers to the development. The interesting point is that Tasmanians will go from boiled lollies to chocolates! They will go prospectively from not having enough power to be able to supply their energy needs to a situation where two major projects will be competing for the available resource of the market.

It is imperative that a number of steps be taken in the face of the position that now exists. Those steps are in the hands of the government — and it must not cop out and put it on anybody else. This government is responsible. It should convene discussions between the respective governments, Duke Energy International and National Grid to make sure the Basslink project is even necessary. The government should tell the people of Gippsland that funding will be considered to enable the cable to be put underground. The government should give an assurance that if the project is to be built it will satisfy environmental and social requirements.

The government should keep the Minister for State and Regional Development out of the issue because he does not have a clue about what is going on; and even if he did, he would be petrified at the thought of having to find a few bob to help Gippslanders, who are really under the hammer with this project.

Rail: Bendigo workshops

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — I grieve today for the loss earlier this month of a major employer in the electorate of Bendigo East with the closure of the Bendigo railway workshops, which were privatised by the former government. The closure of the Bendigo railway workshops is a direct result of the privatisation

policies of the former Liberal–National Party government.

The former government's privatisation of the railway workshops and the rail industry led directly to the loss of 35 jobs in my electorate, but has the potential to cause a far greater loss than just the immediate jobs. At its peak the workshops employed many hundreds of Bendigo men over many decades. In the 1960s and 1970s there were probably more than 500 workers at the workshops. Everyone in Bendigo knew someone who worked there, and some reported as almost comical the sight early in the morning and late in the afternoon when the workers, most of whom rode bicycles, rode to and from work and hundreds poured into and out of the workshops. Sadly that is an image that will no longer be seen in Bendigo.

Many Bendigo people had family members employed at the railway workshops. Indeed, many members of my family have worked there, and were working there until 16 February this year. It was also an important place for the training of young people in many areas of rail manufacturing. The workshops gave many young people in Bendigo a job and an opportunity to develop a career. Those opportunities are now gone. It is not just that 35 jobs were lost from Bendigo when Goninan closed its doors on 16 February; future opportunities for young people and for Bendigo to develop as a rail manufacturer have gone forever. The Liberal–National Party policy of privatising the rail industry was a loaded dice for Bendigo and its workers. It is a sad tale that has led to the closure of this important employer.

In 1995, when there was great pressure by the former government and the Premier on the workers to accept the privatisation deal, there was a false promise by the former Premier that the privatisation of the railway workshops would lead to the establishment of a second ordnance factory in Bendigo. The original factory employed 350 people. The former Premier coerced and bullied the workers and the Bendigo community and used local conservative members as his mouthpieces and cheerleaders to force the workers to accept privatisation. The only Bendigo community leader to speak out against privatisation at the time was the honourable member for Bendigo West when he was the candidate for election. The three conservative members in Bendigo chose to be the local mouthpieces for the Premier instead of sticking up for the workers and their conditions of employment.

Mr Hardman interjected.

Ms ALLAN — As the honourable member for Seymour said: where are they now? The two lower

house members have gone and for all intents and purposes the third one has signalled that he is also on the way out. The workers strongly resisted the privatisation moves by the former government, and to their credit they fought long and hard against what was, in the end, inevitable. The former Premier bullied the local workers and in a fit of pique rang the local paper late one evening and gave the following response to the Bendigo workers who were resisting privatisation:

'Don't blow it, because if you blow it, it will be on your heads'.

He was quoted as saying that:

... if the workers did not have jobs at the end of next week, they only had themselves to blame.

In reference to the deal with Goninan, he was reported as saying:

'If it is consummated, this deal gives the opportunity for long-term employment with a new industry and the opportunity to create the second Bendigo ordnance factory'.

The article further quotes the former Premier as stating that :

... the Goninan offer was a 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that rarely comes to old engineering places'.

That 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity' led to the ultimate death of the workshops. They were privatised while they employed 262 workers, but the work slowly ebbed away. The ground rules were changed by the former government, and it is interesting that Goninan laid the blame for the closure at the feet of the Kennett government.

I refer to a media statement released by Goninan on 17 January when it announced to the Bendigo community that the railway workshops would close on 16 February. The managing director of Goninan, Allan Smith, is quoted as saying:

Goninan took over management of the plant in 1996 in anticipation of a government plan to outsource maintenance of its rolling stock to the private sector.

At the time it seemed like a good way to keep the Bendigo workshops operating and Goninan has put a lot of effort and money into sustaining the plant, training apprentices and searching out new work.

Unfortunately government policy changed about 1997 when railway and tram services were franchised to private operators.

The private railway operators arranged for the work to be done by businesses associated with the franchise holders and inevitably this drastically cut Bendigo's access to maintenance work.

We should remember the history surrounding the former government's change to the ground rules and its moving of the goal posts after the contracts were signed to privatise the Bendigo workshops. Following incidents surrounding the grand prix, the former Premier, in a fit of irrational anger and revenge against the unions, chose not to privatise the rail industry — which is what he told Goninan would occur when it took over in Bendigo in 1995 — but decided to franchise out the rail work, tying up contracts to the successful bidders. Unfortunately for Bendigo, Goninan was not one of the successful bidders, which left it out in the cold with no work coming in.

It is interesting to note that the local newspaper, the *Bendigo Advertiser*, also picked up that Goninan blamed the former government for shifting the goal posts. Its editorial states:

Goninans itself blamed the Kennett government. It said that when it took over the plant (saving it from the Kennett axe, don't forget), Goninans had a reasonable expectation that it would pick up private maintenance contracts for our trains and trams.

What Goninans did not count on was a change in government policy and the wholesale flogging off of the rolling stock.

Mr Leigh interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member for Mordialloc will have the call next, when he can have his say. He should desist from interjecting across the table.

Ms ALLAN — The editorial continues:

This meant the maintenance was then given to companies already associated with the new operators.

Clearly, the Bendigo community, Goninan and the workers all understand who was at fault for the death warrant applying to Bendigo jobs. It was the former government. I note the presence in the chamber of the former Minister for Transport. Jobs in Bendigo have been lost forever because of the policies he introduced.

When the announcement to close Goninan was made, the Minister for Transport stated that the former Kennett government had stabbed the industry in the back. I commend the hard work undertaken by the minister and his department in trying to keep Goninan afloat. It was difficult because the ground rules were changed and the contracts were all tied up after Goninan had been promised it would be provided access to rail maintenance contracts. The Minister for Transport and his department negotiated some work for Bendigo, in particular with National Express, for the \$1.5 million refit of the last Hitachi passenger car at the

workshop. Unfortunately, because of the web of contracts that had been signed by the former government, the work at Bendigo was frozen out. At the end of the day the former government sold out Bendigo workers and the company.

The former Premier courted Goninan but it was not to be a happy marriage. He promised it the riches of privatisation. He led the company to believe a large amount of work would come its way and it would be able to build up its work force. The former government then moved the goal posts with its franchise arrangements. As I said, Goninan was unfortunately not part of those successful bids and was left high and dry along with the workers.

The workers are the victims. When the workshops were closed on Friday, 16 February, the workers left without a job to go to on the following Monday. There may have been only 35 workers left, but that number was down from an initial work force of 262 when it was privatised, and down from, as I said, the many hundreds of Bendigo people, probably thousands, who were employed at Goninan over the decades. The workers and their families are the victims. They do not have a pay packet; and the workers were left without a job to go to the following week. Some members of my family were also left without a job to go to. It is important to note that in the political debate surrounding the closure of Goninan and privatisation, at the end of the day it is workers and their families who are damaged the most by privatisation.

There were many instances where the Kennett government's privatisation policy sucked the life out of country Victoria. There is no better example than the amalgamation of councils and the tendering out of many services which led to the loss of many jobs. Honourable members who have had the chance to read the Harry Potter novels will know of the characters called the Dementors. When I read the novel I was struck by the similarity between the way the Dementors acted and the way members of the former government treated country Victoria. Dementors are large and fearful creatures with no features — no faces. They target their victim and suck the very life out of them. They suck the soul, the happiness and all that is good out of their targets. It struck me that that was what the former government did to Bendigo and to many country communities.

The Dementors in the Harry Potter novels are feared creatures. That is how the former government came to be viewed in country Victoria — creatures to be feared and not necessarily respected. They ultimately paid the electoral consequences. However, in the Harry Potter

novels the Dementors went on to staff the prisons. I suppose members of the former government are confined to their own prison on the opposition benches.

It is interesting to note the contrast and the positives coming into Bendigo since the 1999 state election. The government is working hard to replace services and jobs that were lost by the former government. Yesterday during question time the Premier and the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment spoke of the jobs growth in country Victoria. In the past 12 months 90 000 jobs have been created in Victoria, and over a third of those jobs have been created in regional Victoria — that is, 32 000 jobs.

Mr Hulls interjected.

Ms ALLAN — In manufacturing as well, as the minister notes. When those figures are contrasted with the last full financial year that the Kennett government served out in 1998–99, 98 per cent of all jobs growth in Victoria was created in metropolitan Melbourne with 2 per cent job growth in country Victoria. That is the legacy of the former government, where jobs and services were sucked out of country Victoria by the former government and into metropolitan Melbourne.

Bendigo has seen its own turnaround with significant infrastructure development and growth. Within the first six months of the election of the Bracks government it was announced that AAPT would bring 400 jobs to Bendigo. Through the Minister for Health's initiative to get more nurses into the health system, Bendigo has 100 new nurses. There are more teachers in our schools and significant investment, particularly the introduction of the fast train. That is what being a government is all about. It is not about sucking the life out of the country, as did the former government.

I grieve for the loss of Goninan, an important employer in my electorate. I grieve for the families and the loss of wages suffered by workers. They have had a hard row to hoe. We remember them and commend them for their commitments to their jobs. It is sad that at the end of the day the former government's policies left them without a job.

AWU: funds

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — I grieve about the Australian Workers Union and the allocation of some of its money. The union has a well-known history in the Labor Party. It has been involved in a lot of roting of the funds of many union members. Today I am seeking a fraud squad investigation into what happened to \$57 000 of the union's money.

To set the scene, I want to show the credibility of the witness from whom the information was supplied.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LEIGH — The gentleman concerned — and government members may laugh — is a 20-year member of the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party, the joint president of the Australian Workers Union and a four-year member of the Victorian ALP administrative committee. He is well known to the Minister for Transport because he sat on the administrative committee during the Nunawading Province re-election inquiry that checked out what the honourable member for Thomastown — now the Minister for Transport — was doing when he was secretary of the ALP.

Mr Bob Kernohan has been hounded. Together with a whole range of things that have been done to him, through Telstra the union found his silent phone numbers and has made threatening phone calls to him. Today, the union is still up to its tricks and so are a number of members of the ALP. In a letter to me Mr Kernohan states:

When this is used ... may counteract by attacking me over the \$6500 I received from Wilson ...

That is Bruce Wilson, who was then involved in the union. The letter continues that this person:

is well aware that the money I received came out of the Wilson election fund, this was confirmed by John Cain Jr, senior partner, Maurice Blackburn and Co.

On top of that —

this person —

is also aware that I went to the federal fraud squad and made a statement to this effect.

They found that I had no case to answer.

You must also remember that over half a million dollars went missing that —

the secretary of the union —

was aware of prior to him paying out Wilson and his mates (an additional \$300 000).

I will make all of the material I have available to the house, including a copy of Mr Kernohan's statement to the federal police, following which no charges were laid against him.

This is a man who has spent a lot of years in the Victorian ALP. He has decided to come forward today

because he is sick of what is going on in this open, honest and transparent government. Is it so honest?

Government members interjecting.

Mr LEIGH — Who pays for you guys? The material I will make available includes several statutory declarations and I intend to read them.

Mr Maxfield — Can you read?

Mr LEIGH — I refer to the first statutory declaration which was signed yesterday, although I also have another one signed some time ago by Mr Kernohan. The statutory declaration states:

I had a discussion with ... the then secretary of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) in mid-1995 and, during the discussions —

the secretary —

alerted me to the fact that a building contractor had been to see him seeking final payment for renovation works undertaken and completed at an address that was authorised by the AWU. AWU officials Bill Shorten and Terry Muscat were also aware of this serious matter.

The secretary:

told me that a considerable amount of ... union funds had already been spent on renovations at this property and that his investigations had disclosed that the property in question belonged to —

an individual. I have not named the individual as yet, but I will in a minute. The statutory declaration continues:

... he told me that \$40 000 had been spent by the AWU to date.

The secretary:

told me that —

the person concerned —

was a ... close friend of Bruce Wilson. Wilson was also an AWU secretary.

The person:

was not known to me but —

the secretary —

and Bill Shorten knew her, in fact Bill Shorten said that he knew her well.

I asked —

the secretary —

what was he and the union going to do to recover our members union funds.

The secretary:

told me that he would not rest 'until these —

I cannot use the expletive that is in the document —

crooks are in jail and that the money is returned in full to the union'. To this day, despite court action taken against Mr Wilson and a court order authorising the AWU to recover these moneys nothing has been done.

The secretary:

and myself had a significant fallout over this and other serious fraudulent activities within the union because they wanted to 'cover it up'.

The secretary:

told me that Wilson also spent \$17 000 on women's clothing for —

this person —

out of union funds. The ladies clothing store is called the Town Mode of Melbourne Fashion House.

I do not believe the store exists any more. So \$17 000 of the union's funds were spent by the Victorian branch of the AWU to make this person well dressed. This person ultimately became what one would describe as the best-dressed chief of staff in the country for a Leader of the Opposition, because this person was a former Leader of the Opposition's chief of staff and received the clothes and the renovations.

Mr Hulls — I was the chief of staff.

A Government Member — Do you wear dresses? Were you wearing a dress at that time?

Mr LEIGH — I am well aware of some of the strange habits of the now Attorney-General but I think dressing up in women's clothes is not one of them — that I know of!

I am talking about a former Leader of the Opposition's chief of staff — not the current or former chief of staff, the honourable member for Niddrie — Ms Julia Gillard, who was the chief of staff to the now Victorian Treasurer. While Ms Gillard was swanning around the country, presumably with the Leader of the Opposition, to promote the Labor Party, union funds were being used to renovate her property and \$17 000 of the \$57 000 bought her the best clothes — —

Mr Hulls — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member is casting aspersions on a member of another Parliament. His remarks are

grossly inaccurate, outlandish, outrageous and indeed highly defamatory. The grievance debate is not a time for members of Parliament to get on their high horse and grossly defame federal members of Parliament for their own purpose, whatever that may be. I ask that you bring the honourable member back to the forms of the house and conduct the grievance debate in a proper manner without allowing the honourable member to cast outrageous defamatory aspersions on a federal member of Parliament.

Mr McArthur — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I request that if there are points of order in this vein that you ask the Clerks to stop the clock. I also refer you to Speakers' rulings on this issue. I refer especially to Speaker Wheeler's ruling in 1973 when he said:

In the best traditions of this place, members should refrain from making imputations concerning the official actions of members of other parliaments ...

Mr Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to two things in relation to the ruling. Firstly it says 'in the best traditions of this place'; it is not an absolute prohibition from drawing into question the actions of members of other parliaments. Secondly, the ruling draws a very clear line. It says, 'should refrain from making imputations concerning the official actions of members of other parliaments'.

The honourable member for Mordialloc is bringing into question the actions of a person while not a member of another Parliament, but he is certainly not questioning this person's official actions in any way. The honourable member's issue relates to the possibly fraudulent use of members' funds from a union and where those funds were eventually expended. It does not relate to the official actions of a member of another Parliament. On those grounds you should rule the point of order out of order.

Mr Cooper — Are you going to stop the clock?

Mr Brumby — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the rules of debate in this place, as in other parliaments, are very clear. If a member of Parliament wants to make substantive allegations against another member of Parliament — —

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr Brumby — You have mentioned the person's name now in this debate. If you want to make those sorts of allegations, as repeated in the house by the honourable member for Monbulk, it must be done by way of substantive motion.

To come in here as the honourable member does — a member who has a reputation for never getting out of the gutter, for always being in the gutter — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Brumby — Accusations of that type should be made by way of substantive motion. I stated through you, Mr Acting Speaker, that I assume the honourable member is prepared to make those allegations outside the house, and the gutless little coward opposite says, 'I don't have the guts to do it'!

This is a member of Parliament who cannot help himself to get out of the gutter. I suggest that if he wants to make these allegations he should get to his feet, walk out of this house, stand on the front steps and repeat them. We will then see whether he has the guts and the backbone to back up the filth that he has peddled today in Parliament.

Mr Cooper — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, there are some rules that govern matters that come before this house, and in particular rules that govern points of order. Neither the Attorney-General nor the Treasurer has followed those rules: they have simply made wild allegations. The Treasurer has tried to debate the issue and extend the debate into an attack upon the honourable member for Mordialloc. The realities are that the house runs by standing orders and precedents set by previous Speakers and by the present Speaker.

The honourable member for Monbulk stated that the precedent states that there is no point of order. The only standing order that is relevant to this matter is standing order 108. I notice that the Attorney-General very carefully avoided quoting that standing order because it refers to members of the house and states that:

... all imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on members shall be deemed disorderly.

The honourable member for Mordialloc did not breach standing order 108 in his remarks about Ms Gillard and her misuse of union funds. There is no point of order. Further, the clock should have been stopped to allow the honourable member to finish his contribution.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr LEIGH — If the Labor government is true to its word under its leader, Mr Bracks, that it is an open and honest transparent government, I seek from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services an admission that the government has a rogue union inside

its organisation, affiliated to its body, providing hundreds of thousands of dollars. I have a record of the former president of that organisation saying that hundreds of thousands of dollars of union money has been rorted. What we have uncovered is a small proportion of that money.

The now secretary of the union, Mr Bill Shorten, knew about it, and the former secretary and now the upper house member in this Parliament, Mr Bob Smith, knew about it. They all know about it. Ms Julia Gillard knew about it and she took the 57 000 bucks to avenge herself.

Mr Maxfield interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member for Narracan should not shout like that from the back seat.

Mr Lenders — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to standing order 108, on which the honourable member for Mornington so helpfully addressed us before. The honourable member for Mordialloc has in this case directly and unequivocally impugned the motives of the honourable member for Chelsea Province in another place. It is unambiguous in terms of standing order 108, which reads:

No member shall use offensive or unbecoming words in reference to any member of the house ...

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! I have heard enough. I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr LEIGH — In closing, I seek a police investigation into the misuse of those funds, and I urge the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to take some steps to demonstrate that the Victorian ALP government is as honest as its leader, Mr Bracks, says it is. I do not believe he will do that.

Commonwealth–state financial relations

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — Today I wish to grieve about the ramshackle, antiquated and blatantly unfair system of commonwealth–state financial relations which penalises Victoria. I grieve about a system that is hopelessly complex and broken down and penalises every Victorian family to the tune of \$680 per annum.

Today the Commonwealth Grants Commission, the body charged with distributing commonwealth grants to the states, released its report entitled *A Report on State Revenue Sharing 2001–02*. The report has horrendous implications for all Victorians. On the basis

of what I can only describe as an incomprehensible analysis the CGC has recommended further massive cuts to Victoria's share of commonwealth grants over the next five years. If the federal government accepts the Commonwealth Grants Commission's report — under the legislation the commission's recommendations require approval by the federal government — Victoria's total subsidy to the other states will increase from an already record high of \$847 million in 2000–01 to \$960 million in 2001–02. Worse still, the grants commission's recommendations for the out years will penalise Victorians even more.

The Department of Treasury and Finance had already anticipated a deterioration in Victoria's share of GST payments, but this latest update will have a significant additional impact. Preliminary estimates over the forward estimates period are as follows: the \$113 million cut for the 2001–02 financial year means a direct impact on the budget bottom line of \$61 million in 2001–02. That will appreciate and grow significantly in the out years to \$122 million in 2002–03, \$191 million in 2003–04, and a massive \$262 million in 2004–05.

I repeat for honourable members, particularly those on the other side of the house who seem to misunderstand the importance of these statistics — —

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — No. The new figures are released today. The analysis is virtually incomprehensible. Looking through the out years particularly, through to 2004–05, it means that the forward estimates for Victoria's budget surplus will now have to be adjusted down by \$262 million by 2004–05. As I said, the latest numbers released today can be described only as perverse, incomprehensible and certainly impossible to predict. To put it another way, and I stress this, if the Howard government accepts the CGC's recommendations, the Bracks government will have \$61 million less to spend on hospitals or schools or tax cuts for Victorians in the next financial year, increasing through to a massive \$262 million less in 2004–05. That is money which, as I said, could go to schools, for teachers; to hospitals, for nurses, or to tax cuts, for consumers, households or business.

It means that Victoria is now subsidising more per head of population than it has ever done before and, worse still, that it is continuing to subsidise states such as Queensland, and the Australian Capital Territory, despite the obviously high living standards in those places.

I repeat that every Victorian household should send a message to the Howard government, because the Howard government has to endorse and agree to those recommendations. Why should it be that Victorians this year and next year will be subsidising the other states to the tune of almost \$700 per household per year? It is an extraordinarily large amount of money. It is totally unacceptable. The system has become a joke. It is absolute highway robbery for Victorians. The federal government and the grants commission have their hands in Victorians' pockets every day of the week, every month of the year.

The starting point to understand this is a thing called vertical fiscal imbalance. Essentially, it is the extent to which the states rely on commonwealth grants. Going back 80 years, in 1918–19 grants from the commonwealth represented about a third of the states' total revenues. However, today for a variety of reasons, federal government grants to the states represent 53 per cent of total revenue for the states. The introduction of the GST — supported so strongly by those opposite, Howard's heroes — means that the states are now even more reliant on commonwealth funding.

This brings me to the issue of what is called horizontal fiscal equalisation. The commonwealth's position of dominance in relation to revenue collection means that it has control over the distribution of funding between the states and territories.

The problem that arises from vertical fiscal imbalance is greatly exacerbated by the blatantly bad deal for Victoria in the distribution of commonwealth GST revenues and special purpose payments between the states. GST payments alone account for something like a quarter of Victoria's total revenue. Of the grants Victoria receives from the federal government, \$1 in \$4 that the government uses to put its budget together comes from the distribution of GST revenues.

Obviously I do not need to confirm to the house that the GST is anything but a revenue bonanza for the states. Indeed, GST revenue flows to the states and territories, but they have relinquished financial assistance grants and other payments from the commonwealth as well as the revenue lost from abolishing certain state taxes.

Victoria will not benefit from the GST until 2007–08. I am always amazed that some honourable members opposite and some members in the business community were misled by the former Kennett government. I get the occasional letter saying, 'Mr Brumby, now that you're getting all the GST revenues, why don't you abolish payroll tax?'. The government is not abolishing payroll tax because Victoria will not break even under

Mr Howard's GST until 2007–08. Victoria will not get ahead until 2007–08.

To put it another way, for every dollar that a Victorian spends on the GST — whether it is when buying clothes, cars, meals, excursion fees or whatever else related to school and education — the state gets back only 83 cents. Victorians pay a dollar, but do they get a dollar back? No, they get back just 83 cents! And where does the money go? It goes to the other states including Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.

The Victorian government does not object to helping out the poorer states such as Tasmania, the Northern Territory or even South Australia. However, it strenuously objects to helping out Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.

Why should hardworking Victorians in each household be paying hundreds of dollars each year to subsidise people in Queensland, which has no state debt and its taxes are lower than any other state in Australia?

Why should Victoria subsidise the Australian Capital Territory? Average household incomes in the territory are some 40 per cent higher than that of the average Australian household. Why should hardworking Victorians pay taxes to help out well-to-do families in the territory? It is like a government in Victoria putting a special tax on every household to cut the taxes of the people who live in Brighton and Toorak; yet that is what the present system does.

Let me put this in context. In 1997–98 Victoria's subsidy to the other states was \$614 million. In 1998–99, it was \$660 million. In 1999–2000 it increased to \$788 million, and this financial year 2000–01 it is \$847 million. Next financial year, 2001–02, if the CGC's recommendations are accepted by the commonwealth, it will be \$960 million, which is almost \$200 a head for every Victorian man, woman and child. If you were to aggregate that over the last decade almost \$7.5 billion has been paid to the other states.

The CGC oversees a distribution budget to the states of something like \$25 billion or \$26 billion — that is, the budget distributed by the CGC is bigger than the total Victorian budget, which is about \$20 billion. Victoria wants the methods used by the CGC — its accounting terminologies, the basis of its payments, the statistics it uses, the outcomes, the estimates, and the assumptions — subject to the same rigour that the Victorian budget or the New South Wales budget is required to undertake. At the moment, it is a ramshackle, antiquated and out-of-date system.

Victoria says, 'Enough is enough!'. In New South Wales, Premier Carr and Treasurer Egan are also saying that enough is enough and that this has got out of hand. This year, the centenary of Federation, with a federal election due, we are putting the federal government on notice. We say we want reform of this antiquated, outmoded and blatantly unfair system. We want a new arrangement that takes into account the different capacities of the states and does not penalise competitive, outward-looking and efficient states with strong economies.

Why should every hardworking Victorian family, whether living in Mitcham, Bendigo or Gippsland, pay \$680 a year to help out the other states? In particular, why should Victorians be paying to bail out Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory?

Some of the figures I have mentioned are truly bizarre. This year in its adjustments the CGC came up with an absolute special in relation to superannuation. The way it assesses superannuation is based on some pseudo accrual accounting methods. It bears no relationship to reality. There is a complete confusion by the commission with accrual accounting, balance sheet adjustments and asset pay-downs. What it has done with superannuation will cost Victoria \$40 million next year alone.

This ought to be a bipartisan issue, but I have hardly been overwhelmed by the offers of support from the Liberal and National parties opposite to join with members of the Bracks government in calling for overdue reform of the system. We want it changed. We put the federal government on notice. Later in March when state treasurers meet with the federal Treasurer, Mr Costello, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia will say to the federal government, 'We want you to reject this report. We think this report is rubbish. It penalises Victoria and is a hopeless standard to set'.

This year, the centenary of Federation, and with a federal election imminent, the Victorian government is putting the federal government, Treasurer Costello and Prime Minister Howard on notice and saying, 'Enough is enough. We want a new and fair system, a total overhaul, and above all, a fair go for Victorians and none of the nonsense of paying \$1.2 billion a year in combined subsidies to the other states to prop up the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland. We want a fair deal'.

Gippsland: development

Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) — Today I am still grieving for the distance Gippsland still has to travel.

The main message of this speech is that we have done some, we are doing a lot, but more is still needed.

In November 1999 I wrote to the then new Labor government discussing the challenges that I saw ahead for encouraging regional development in Gippsland. I discussed some of the problems that long-term government neglect and lack of regional leadership had fostered mainly because we had too many years of the National Party kow-towing to city-focused state and federal governments.

I put forward the argument then that the necessary elements for our solution in Gippsland were already in Gippsland — in the people, their sometimes bloody-minded stubbornness, their hard work and their very strong communities, and in our natural resources and incredibly beautiful natural attributes. I urged the government then to help us grow Gippsland, not from the outside but from our own local seed, utilising the will to work which I very much see as already being there. That paper is on my web site. It was a very open communication, and anybody is welcome to look at it.

Last Friday I attended a Gippsland regional summit that was held at Monash University Gippsland Campus at Churchill. It was organised by our regional development body, Gippsland Development. It had funding support from the state government and there was an address, among others, by the Minister for State and Regional Development and Treasurer, John Brumby. The summit was attended by nearly 300 people from right across Gippsland — councils, business people, educationalists, farmers and community activists. That day was a very good indication of both how far we have come and how far we still have to go. The fact that it happened, happened so productively and was so well supported is a sign of how far we have come. I congratulate Gippsland Development on organising the day.

Gippsland Development as an organisation has likewise come a long way and still has a way to go. I will continue to be something of a thorn in the side of Gippsland Development, pushing it to improve its reach across the region, to abandon some old thinking and pet projects for which the time has passed, and encouraging it to work closely with democratically elected local government. But we do need Gippsland Development to be strong, innovative and a very well-focused voice for the region. Even though one council in the region is still not represented on Gippsland Development, I was pleased to see that that council had strong representation at the summit.

One of the excellent aspects of the conference was its detailing of some of our success stories. These are real success stories rather than some of the fluff that used to get talked about in my first term in Parliament. They include industries such as Kiel Industries, plastic moulders in Mirboo North; Flavorite Hydroponic Tomatoes in Warragul; the Robert Gordon Pottery in Cardinia shire; Gippsland Aeronautics, which operates out of Sale; the Herd Improvement Cooperative at Maffra; and Neville Smith (Timber Industries) in Heyfield. The grand prix circuit at Phillip Island was mentioned as one of the great successes, as well as the flower farm at Newhaven, which seems to grow every time I go past. I could add many more very successful companies from my end, including Select Produce at Korumburra and Wonthaggi, Burra Foods and Burra Sheet Metals at Korumburra and Drouin Commercial Printers, which is a very successful multimedia company.

Those companies and many more like them demonstrate that Gippsland can do it. Gippslanders are doing it now. We need to talk about those successes to motivate and encourage other companies to understand that they too can do it. One of the things I like very much about Gippslanders specifically, but also about country people in general, is that they have extremely well-developed, what I will politely say starts with 'bull' and ends with 'it', detectors. They have heard too much of that kind of delivery for too long, as the previous state and soon-to-be previous federal government have found, and they have turned their backs on it. The success stories which I talked about briefly and which were discussed at the conference are not fantasies; they are very real. Often the companies had developed in spite of government rather than with any assistance from it. We need to promote their efforts.

The Department of State and Regional Development has been offering strategic assistance and positive directions for many companies. I hope somewhere in DSRD there is a large map, and I hope on that large map there are pointers to exactly where this strategic assistance and advice has actually had positive outcomes. I hope the spaces and gaps are also duly noted, so that efforts can be doubled in those areas.

Various workshops and speakers at the Gippsland summit reiterated the need for Gippsland to work together as a region. That means finding and encouraging regional leadership, which, as I said, was lacking for so long under the fairly dead and parochial hand of the National Party. The Gippsland local government network and Gippsland Development have been showing strong signs of being able to take on that

leadership role. They need to be supported and encouraged. The conference said plainly that we need much clearer branding of Gippsland as a whole region, with marketing promotion locally, Australia-wide and overseas, and we still need the extension and improvement of our infrastructure, particularly in the areas of education, roads, public transport and links between the towns.

I urge the federal government to improve its efforts, especially as regards telecommunications. It is difficult to persuade a business community that Gippsland can do business as efficiently and effectively as the rest of the world when mobile phones keep dropping out and fixed telephone systems and communications systems are inferior.

However, while there is a need to promote our successes and to look to the future, we need to acknowledge a continuing, very real hardship. Part of the consequence of that long-term hardship is an extreme sensitivity to any perceived further losses. It might be difficult for the government when it sees that its actions may have long-term advantages, but this sensitivity to perceived further losses is very real, has long-term origins and must be accommodated. For example, I will discuss the proposed marine national parks. I accept the long-term benefits of marine national parks for the environment, for expanding tourism opportunities and for improving fish stocks, but in the short term both fishermen and quite a few of our local communities perceive the potential of marine national parks to be a loss.

The way to deal with that perception is not to deny it. The previous state government and the current federal government made a habit of pretending that those losses were not real. They tried and they failed. The way to deal with that perceived loss is to accommodate and address the problem. For example, when the government makes its decision on the extent and range of any marine national parks it will need to ensure that there is an immediate and direct benefit perceivable in those local areas to cancel out any perceived losses.

Those direct and immediate benefits might be research facilities, fisheries officers, tourism promotion, interpretation centres or business development support. The government will need to work with each community to find the most appropriate and affordable benefits, but those benefits will need to come at the same time in recognition that prior hardship — and a real hardship is still being felt — has resulted in increased vulnerability and fragility in many of those small communities.

The same kind of thing can be said of the decision to impose quotas on the rock lobster fishery. The government believes there will be essential long-term benefits from the decision to impose quotas, but there is no doubt that in the short term there will be pain for the local people and the communities in which they live and work. The government needs to acknowledge that pain, and to work with those fishing families and their communities to materially assist them during the adjustment and rebuilding period.

In Gippsland our communities are our strength. I am very passionately — by birth, by culture, and by fairly bloody-minded commitment — a Gippslander. I repeat often that we have very strong communities in Gippsland. We breed good children in Gippsland, and we take care of them. Those communities and families are still vulnerable and a great deal of sensitivity is required in imposing changes.

We appreciate the efforts of the government to return more benefits to the region, to build our small communities and to support them. However, I repeat the message: much has been and is being done, but there is still a long way to go before we can truly say that Gippsland is a strong, prosperous, innovative and economically more viable community than it has been during long years when life was too hard.

Police: prisoner accommodation

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — I grieve for the Victorian police today because of a police minister who is unable to make a decision to fix a straightforward problem. At the moment morale among our police is at rock bottom because of the minister's inability to solve problems. Police cells across the state are bursting at the seams and the minister is refusing to address the problem.

I note with interest that as opposition spokesman on police matters prior to the last election he issued a policy document entitled 'No more excuses on crime'. I think the printer made a mistake. It should have read 'Nothing but excuses for crime', because that is surely what we are seeing now from the minister — excuses about why police stations are not being built — and is why instead we are having feasibility studies. The public is receiving fudged figures on police numbers. In the minister's own police annual report the government would rather fudge figures by including recruits than tell the truth. The problem of prison overcrowding has been in local papers for weeks, and all the minister can do is blame the previous government.

I refer the minister to the 'No more excuses on crime' document, where he states:

A first term Labor government will be tough on crime and even tougher on its causes in order to make a Victorian community safer.

I suggest strongly that the Victorian community is not feeling very safe at the moment. More seriously, community safety is at risk because there is a fear now that judges and magistrates are not sending people to jail because there is not enough room.

On 25 January, 248 offenders were being held in police cells. According to the assistant secretary of the Police Association, Mr Paul Mullett, the police cells have the capacity to hold only 120 offenders, yet on 25 January they were holding a startling total of 248! But it gets worse. Of the 248 offenders, 109 were sentenced prisoners — that is, prisoners who may have already been in a police cell for 20 days awaiting trial, and who after the judge sentenced them to a term of imprisonment have gone back to the same police cell instead of being sent to a prison. Ninety had been in police cells for 10 days or more and 16 for 20 days or more. After visiting police cells in Bendigo, Frankston, and Bairnsdale I could not think of anything worse than to be stuck in those rat holes for 20 days or more. It is absolutely and utterly disgraceful.

However, rather than fix the problem the minister has blamed the previous government. On 7 February the opposition released more figures showing that this time 304 prisoners were being held in police cells, 113 of whom were sentenced prisoners. All should have been in a secure prison where they would receive appropriate treatment, whether it be for alcohol addiction, drug addiction or violence. What sort of treatment can a prisoner receive at a police cell? On 17 February the Police Association said there were 309 prisoners held at police cells, including 39 women. One inmate at Wangaratta had been held in a police cell since 25 January.

The final straw came last week. The situation is now clearly out of control. The number of prisoners in police cells is up to 326 compared with 248 just four weeks ago — and there is no action from the government. The last lot of figures released to the opposition showed 42 women were being held in police cells. At Keilor Downs, for example, there are six females and one male in a B-category police complex. Those cells should not be used for prisoners — they are for locking up drunks overnight or for people that need to stay overnight because they are awaiting transfer — but the minister has put six female prisoners in with the one male prisoner. How are the police able to operate

logistically with prisoners of mixed genders housed in a police complex? It doesn't make any sense. Do they let the male out to walk around, then lock him up and let out the six females? What about the use of toilets and showers? It must be a logistical nightmare.

In Craigieburn in the minister's own electorate five people are locked up in another B-category police cell, and at Narre Warren there are seven in a cell. The other night the situation became so bad that there were no padded cells available for prisoners with a mental illness who had to be locked up. This situation is now clearly out of control.

I refer the minister to the document the opposition calls 'Nothing but excuses'. According to the minister's adviser, Mr Tim Mitchell, the reason for the overcrowding is that the previous Liberal government made changes to the law which lengthened jail terms! He says it is the former government's fault because it lengthened jail terms. I would like to think that at the next election Tim Mitchell will advise Minister Haermeyer that the government should shorten jail terms and let the Victorian people decide they want the existing system, whereby if you commit an offence in this state you will be locked up for the appropriate time, or Tim Mitchell's suggestion that sentences for some of these people be shortened and that they then be let back out on the streets so they can commit other offences!

It could not be more ridiculous. At the next election the Liberal Party will campaign on being tough on law and order — if people do the crime, they will do the time. That contrasts with Tim Mitchell's advice to Minister Haermeyer that the length of terms of imprisonment should be examined. The government's pathetic solution to solve the present crisis is to set up another working committee involving the Victoria Police, the Victoria Police Association and anybody who is involved in that field. That will be a big issue, but it becomes more interesting when one reads the headline in the *Bendigo Advertiser* of 2 December last year entitled 'Minister is point scoring: Mitchell'. You would expect such a headline to be from an opposition member or from me as opposition spokesperson, but it is from the minister's own adviser, Tim Mitchell, accusing his own minister of point scoring rather than resolving the issue of reducing numbers in police cells and prison numbers.

I turn to police numbers and police morale. The annual report of Victoria Police shows that in 1999 there were 9360 working police. One year later, when the Labor government promised an increase of 200 police, there was a net decrease of 2. For the minister to honour his election promises he has to train 802 police in

three years. Figures released over the past couple of years show that for the last calendar year police numbers have increased by only 100, but the minister says it is more than 200.

The morale of the Victoria Police is important. Under the Labor government there are fewer police, police cells are overcrowded and prisons are bursting at the seams. The Victorian community desperately needs Victoria Police not to be mobile jailers looking after prisoners; they should be in their cars patrolling the streets to ensure safety in the community.

Member for Hawthorn: conflict of interest

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Gaming) — I grieve for the loss of an informed and sincere debate on gaming issues in this state. Over the past few weeks the opposition spokesperson on gaming has engaged in a campaign to mislead the Victorian people about this government's responsible gambling reforms. By using misleading comments and rubbery figures he has attempted to convince the Victorian people that the government is interested in nothing more than how much tax it takes from the gaming industry.

All that is ever heard from the opposition spokesperson on gaming is that the government is earning too much revenue from gaming or that it should not have introduced the footy tipping competition. That is the extent of the Liberal Party's gaming policy, the party that when in government had a let-it-rip attitude on gambling. Labor is the only government that has tried to pull back the reins. The honourable member has no proposals for responsible gaming initiatives or better regulation of the industry. He is all about how much revenue the government is deriving and whether there should be a footy tipping competition. Tax and footy tipping are his preoccupation.

An examination of the register of members' interests provides some understanding. According to the register, the honourable member for Hawthorn, a frontbencher in the opposition, has shares in the Fosters Brewing Group. What does that group do? Among other things, through Carlton and United Breweries Ltd, it is the sole owner of Australian Leisure and Hospitality with some 3324 poker machines and 46 venues. It is the single largest operator of gaming venues in the state.

Its recent annual report highlights that the earnings and accelerated profit growth of Australian Leisure and Hospitality was up 35.7 per cent. This opposition spokesperson on gaming with shares in that company does not say anything about regulation. He talks only

about the revenue side, which means potentially what companies keep in their pockets. The company's profits are increasing and the honourable member is earning income from it.

For the year ended 30 June 2000, Australian Leisure and Hospitality contributed \$110 million to the Fosters Brewing Group's before-tax profit of \$656.7 million. This division of Fosters is earning \$110 million predominantly from gambling, about 1/3 of Fosters' total before-tax profit.

The Fosters Brewing Group is the sole owner of Carlton and United Breweries Ltd, which runs a footy tipping competition through its 46 different venues. If you go into a CUB pub you can participate in the footy tipping competition and derive prizes from it.

It is interesting that the honourable member's shareholding is not insignificant. It is not as though he has only 20 shares. According to the publicly available share register for the Fosters Brewing Group he has more than 12 000 shares.

The register of members' interest shows he has shares in various organisations totalling two pages, which is fine. However, there is a clear issue about whether a conflict of interest arises with his duties as a frontbencher and his deriving income from that source and whether that affects the way he responds to that policy area.

Mr Doyle — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I seek your guidance. The minister is straying perilously close to casting a slur upon a member of this house when he alleges, as he has just done, that there may be a conflict of interest in his duties as a frontbencher. As a member in this place he has declared, quite properly, his pecuniary interests. I suggest to you, Mr Acting Speaker, that the minister should not be making such a grubby attack on a personality which in the most low way —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! I do not uphold the point of order but caution that if the debate follows this particular course there may be an issue of relevance.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — The 12 000 shares are currently valued at about \$57 000. Why then is his focus simply on government revenue and footy tipping? There may not be issues of conflict but there are issues of perception. I applaud the fact that the honourable member divested his Tabcorp shares when he became a frontbencher. That is reasonable because it is obviously direct. However, Fosters, in which he has an interest, is also earning gambling income from the Australian

Leisure and Hospitality division. If more revenue is going to the government it potentially means less revenue will go to the industry. If there is criticism about the government's footy tipping competition there is a perception associated with that business having a financial interest in its own footy tipping competition.

In the absence of any debate about regulatory reform and other responsible gambling initiatives, there are certain issues that should be addressed by the honourable member. I have no problem with the Fosters Brewing Group because it is a reputable company. Backbenchers in this chamber who do not have portfolio responsibilities may have shares.

Mr Baillieu — I'm here, John!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! The honourable member for Hawthorn has been in this place for only a short period, but the use of first names in that context is not allowed.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — Other honourable members have shares in the Fosters Brewing Group, which is fine. However, a frontbencher has a clear responsibility not to have any semblance of interest that may affect the decisions made.

He became a frontbencher in July last year and divested himself of his Tabcorp shares. That is entirely appropriate. Maybe he thought those other ones would go away — that no-one would look at his 12 000 other shares or at whether Fosters had any gaming interests. Those shares are certainly valuable. Earnings per share were up 15.3 per cent and the fully franked dividend was up 11.5 per cent. Fosters shares are good to be in, no doubt about that. It is a good, reputable company.

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — Every time we have a drink Ted smiles. That's right, fine!

Gaming: government policy

The opposition spokesperson focuses on two areas of the government's activity in gambling, but the government has done much more in many areas and the debate covers much wider ground than footy tipping or even revenue alone. When a person who holds shares in a company that earns income from gambling wants to sit in judgment on what the government is doing about gambling it is not OK to simply mouth off on two issues as if they were the only things that mattered. The government has done a great many things, and I would have thought a frontbencher would comment on some of them. The honourable member cannot continually

moan about what the government is doing — but only on revenue and footy tipping. He should advise the house whether he has a conflict of interest, and his leader needs to decide whether the honourable member should continue in the job.

There is a clear lack of sincerity in the opposition on issues of gaming. Opposition members were part of the let-'er-rip government and now they want to bag the Bracks government by saying it earns too much money. If it earns too much it is because of the let-'er-rip attitude — an attitude the government is trying to pull back. Maybe the honourable member has other interests.

As I have informed the house in the past, the previous government did not listen to the advice of its own regulators. The Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority sought a responsible gambling strategy from the previous government at various times, but the advice it received from the regulator was rejected on at least three occasions. This government is working with the regulator because it knows what reforms need to take place in the industry. The task given to it by the Bracks government is to provide responsible gambling.

Do we hear about responsible gambling from the opposition? No, we don't. The previous government left unchecked the placement of poker machines around the state, whereas this government has put a cap on areas of higher concentration. The previous government did very little research into the social impact or into regulatory measures that could reduce problem gambling. That government thought only about economic benefits, not about effective measures to reduce problem gambling.

The former government failed to undertake broad, independent and comprehensive research. The Bracks government, through an independent gambling research panel, is now addressing that lack, and shortly there will be an announcement of the advice that panel is giving to me about how to reduce problem gambling and minimise harm to the people.

What did the former government do with the Community Support Fund? That was a rort fund — a slush fund — and communities could not access it unless Big Jeff said yes. The Bracks government has reformed the CSF process, giving responsibility to a nine-member community advisory council that will report independently to this place and will be audited separately by the Auditor-General.

There will be new guidelines about how the money will be returned to communities. The key focus will be on

promoting responsible gambling, building communities and funding projects that will benefit the community. Income derived from the CSF will go towards rebuilding communities affected by problem gambling, and there will be effective, targeted campaigns to achieve that aim.

Between 1993 and 1999 the previous government allocated \$37.5 million from the CSF to research, community education, client services and training — its problem gambling services strategy. By contrast, the Minister for Community Services announced at her recent press conference a few days ago the Bracks government's huge contribution: \$22 million already allocated to the strategy, and the government has been in office for only 18 months. What a great result!

Members of the community are now getting strong, targeted information on the effects gambling has on them. They have a phone number to ring to get support. The number of calls being made requesting support or one-on-one counselling has increased by a huge amount.

The advertising campaign mounted by the previous government failed. It was based on a strategy of 'If it's no longer fun, walk away' and had the effect of downplaying the addictive nature of problem gambling. The Bracks government has adopted a new strategy, launched at Maribyrnong a number of months ago by the Minister for Community Services and me, that gets people to think about what they are gambling with.

The government has banned poker machines in venues where minors are present. It has banned 24-hour poker machine venues in country and regional Victoria and limited 24-hour gambling in Melbourne to venues that can pass a social and economic impact test. Applicants for a new gaming application, a 24-hour licence renewal or installation of, say, five extra poker machines are required to pass a net social and economic impact test.

For the first time councils are having a say on behalf of their communities, and the government is encouraging councils to develop local gambling policies, codes of conduct and gambling charters. The previous government threatened to sack councils if they expressed a wish to have a say about gambling. The government is now encouraging them because it wants comprehensive local views about what should happen with gambling so it can consider the social and economic impacts knowledgeably.

The government has done more. It has made the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority more open and

transparent. Soon there will be open public hearings of the authority, similar to open local council meetings. Members of the public will be able to turn up and see what is happening. The authority will have to report on why it makes the decisions it does, and councils and applicants will be able to attend. Members of the public will be able to watch as the process is demystified.

The government now releases into the public arena as much information as it is in the public interest to release. So, for example, the government recently released the latest turnover figures by local government area so that communities can be equipped with information to generate debates in their local areas. Whether points made in debate are right or wrong, informed debates lead people towards the correct answers. That is what the government's actions are all about: more information that communities can use and that can be used as part of the social and economic impact process.

The government continues to reform the gaming industry and fosters responsible gambling. Everything we hear on the matter from members opposite is about revenue — which means income forgone by the industry — or about a footy tipping competition. The proceeds from the footy tipping competition go to sports development and health funding, unlike privately run footy tipping competitions such as the one run by Carlton and United Breweries.

As I said before, I have no problem with Foster's Brewing Group Ltd; it is a great, reputable company and is doing well in the share market. Nevertheless, a frontbencher should have no perceived conflict of interest.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! The minister's time has expired.

MAS: royal commission

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — I am tempted to grieve about a minister of the Crown who does not understand his responsibilities or the gravity of his high office and instead indulges in personality slur; but today's debate is limited by time so I cannot.

Instead, I grieve about a matter the opposition has brought to the Parliament before, the royal commission into the Metropolitan Ambulance Service. Honourable members know its well-trodden background, including the refusal of legal representation for the Metropolitan Ambulance Service. They know about the government's backflip on that and about my battle in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to get freedom of information documents released — a battle

which in the end the government lost. They know about the government's cynical removal of the commission's terms of reference 1, 2 and 4 — the very terms of reference that gave rise to the royal commission — on the day Cathy Freeman ran the final of the 400-metre race at the Olympic Games.

Honourable members also know about the ongoing problems with deadlines. First it was July 2000, then December, and then it was April. Now, apparently, it is going to be July 2001. They know about the Supreme Court action taken against the commission, about the cost blow-outs that have occurred every six months and about the recent claims by a senior Queen's Counsel at the commission that the commission itself has a structured unfairness.

Recently the role of the Department of Human Services and its responsibilities to the royal commission became apparent. Earlier this month it was revealed that the Department of Human Services paid \$311 000 for a second-year lawyer whose market value was about \$50 000 to \$60 000 to monitor the proceedings of the royal commission and to carry out DHS legal work. Why the department would spend — waste — that much money is beyond me. The reason the department gave for the appointment was that there was too little time between the announcement of the royal commission and its commencement for a full-time lawyer to be employed, so a contract was entered into that cost the state \$300 000!

The public then learnt that the contract had been extended in February until June with no attempt to alter the terms of employment. The department said it had kept the lawyer on because he developed invaluable expertise and continuity was critical. We were told by a government spokesman that the minister had looked into the issue and he was satisfied proper processes were followed. So the official line was that the department could not have an in-house lawyer for \$50 000 or \$60 000 because things started too quickly, that the processes were entirely proper and the contract had to be extended to June.

We now find there was an in-house lawyer who worked on the legal requirements and monitoring of the royal commission. That public servant raised questions about the department's handling of potential evidence. He expressed concern that a review of files, when they were presented to the royal commission, might raise further issues regarding their state. What conclusions can be drawn from the concern expressed by that public servant? Was it that the files were being cleansed before being presented to the royal commission? Why would the department do that? How were those files

treated before they were delivered to the royal commission? Using the department's terminology, that in-house lawyer was removed from handling the files required to be presented to the royal commission. It is an inescapable conclusion that because a public servant asked difficult questions he was shunted aside. The department and the government should explain why he was shunted aside and why there has been obfuscation.

There may be a good reason why the department did not tell the truth about its use of an in-house lawyer and the outside consultant. There may be a good reason why the department removed that in-house lawyer. There may be no substance to the questions that the public servant raised about document preparation. There may be a good reason why the department has also removed its contract lawyer. It may all be completely innocent, but the reality is that the confusion, half-truths, backtracking and the record of this government means that this issue must be brought into the open.

Today I wrote to the royal commissioner asking him to investigate the integrity of documents and files produced to the royal commission by government departments, in particular, the Department of Human Services. One hopes it has been completely and utterly proper. There are so many questions about the process so far that this question must be raised. The issue raises further concerns about the behind-the-scenes political meddling in the processes of the royal commission. Of course, that would be inappropriate. I have written to the royal commission so that this matter can be cleared up in the public interest.

Disability services: early intervention

Ms CAMPBELL (Minister for Community Services) — I grieve for children with disabilities and their families who, under the Kennett government, had been refused access to early intervention services and who suffered a great deal of uncertainty about their futures.

Under the Kennett government, despair, instability, uncertainty and an unstable work force characterised the early intervention sector. That is in sharp contrast to the strong direction provided by the Bracks government, accompanied by strong financial support for early intervention services. It is widely recognised that under the Kennett government, particularly under the former Minister for Community Services, increasing instability resulted from a number of factors. In the mid to late 1990s there was uncertainty about the direction of policy and the work force in the early

childhood intervention services. There was an unclear policy framework.

The previous government's focus on fiscal policy, to the detriment of social and environmental policy development, fuelled speculation about the outsourcing of specialist children's services teams. That fuelling of the fire was well justified. It brought about high levels of anxiety among staff. Would their employment continue? Would they be outsourced? Would they have a positive future?

Funding for services continued on an ad hoc and historic basis, which resulted in inequitable patterns of funding. Competitive tendering ensured that the system was destabilised. Ongoing employment opportunities in specialist children's services were limited and the future of staff was problematic.

As a result of competitive tendering the fostering of inter-agency collaboration collapsed. Collaboration could not occur because it was seen to be talking to the enemy. These factors contributed to a significant reduction in the capacity of the early childhood intervention services and agencies to deliver services to children with disabilities, which resulted in ineffective and inefficient delivery of services. In contrast to that miserable past, the Labor government has developed a partnership with early intervention services which focuses on stronger citizens, stronger families and stronger communities.

The Department of Human Services publication entitled *Stronger Citizens Stronger Families Stronger Communities — Partnerships in Community Care* contains a response to Professor Carter's report.

Mr Perton interjected.

Ms CAMPBELL — If you listened you might learn something. Professor Carter made a number of recommendations to the government. Recommendation 9 states:

That universal and selective prevention and early intervention programs be established with whole of government and other partnership support, and that they be targeted at supporting critical transitions at a range of sensitive developmental levels for children and young people.

The government was pleased to respond to that recommendation. It states:

The strengthening of prevention and early intervention services is a key community services priority that recognises the importance of targeting services at critical life transition points, such as birth and primary and secondary school entry. In this document a particular emphasis is placed on

strengthening support to families with infants and young children and how that may be best achieved.

Currently early intervention services for children operates from birth to school entry. It canvassed children with a developmental delay and/or disability. It is currently provided by 52 early intervention agencies funded by the Department of Human Services and by directly employed specialist children's services regional teams. I place on record my appreciation to each and every one of the people involved in the fantastic delivery of early intervention services in this state.

The services provide a wide spectrum of interventions and support, from special education, therapy services, family service coordination and counselling to support that enables access to the more generalist services like preschool and child care and other parental support. For children with high support needs, the government provides respite care.

The Bracks government is committed to the effective delivery of a quality early intervention service because it is best for children and their families and will enable a one-community philosophy to be lived. The government is absolutely committed to ensuring that children with disabilities have the opportunity to reach their full potential, to blossom, and that their families are adequately supported.

In the context of building a strong early intervention system and meeting the needs of children and families I have engaged in significant work within the department and with early intervention non-government service providers. That significant work has resulted in the development of a new vision and framework for the delivery of early intervention. That process is, and will continue to be, challenging.

I place on record my appreciation of the early intervention sector managers and the parents who have contributed to the consultations and to the development of the framework. It has been done on top of current workloads, family responsibilities and meeting the needs of their own children. Those who have in-depth knowledge of the monumental efforts that families with children with disabilities make for their sons or daughters and the wider disability sector will understand why I place on record recognition of their fabulous work.

Often when meeting families who have children with developmental delay or significant disability you wonder how they manage to support their children and wider families and provide the networks of supports to so many others in similar situations.

The work is challenging but it is providing a strong future direction, a strong commitment to addressing the serious issues of inequality of access and fragmentation of the service system.

One constructive result of that work is that agencies that previously kept their budgets secret are now beginning to share information about what they are receiving and providing. Some agencies that have significant lobbying skills, were in the past well placed with government and conscientiously worked the system have been allocated the equivalent of \$7000 per child. However, as I mentioned before, other services have been funded on an ad hoc basis and get significantly less with the average being around \$300. Under this government I will ensure that agencies that work conscientiously in a collaborative fashion with the child as the focus will be recognised and that the ad hoc funding of the past is gone.

I have also been working with the Department of Human Services for a cultural change away from competitive tendering and a market-driven approach to one based on partnership between citizens, service providers and the community. This is in sharp contrast to the previous minister, who will be enlightened if he bothers to listen. On 7 July 1997 the previous minister signed a brief on the future service model for specialist children's services. What did he sign? In the key directions he signed an agreement that the families of children with a special developmental need would be charged a fee for service. Families that were already trying to cope with children with disabilities and were working hard to ensure the best for their children were to be slugged with a fee for service.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster will get the call shortly, I understand.

Ms CAMPBELL — The future directions document, signed by the previous minister, recommended support for children with chronic needs, but children with lower level needs could be provided with support only after their families' incomes had been scrutinised and after a thorough examination of their existing service utilisation patterns. This minister will not charge a fee for service and will not say that only if a child has chronic needs can the government provide services.

As I outlined earlier, under the future directions document signed by the previous minister, specialist children's services had a problematic future. From the

debates going on in the community at the moment we learn that families are appreciative of the fabulous work done by the Department of Human Services specialist children's services team. As this government is committed to a strong public service and a strong community service organisation base, I will ensure that specialist children's services are delivered from within the department and that the staff who do such a sterling job and provide such sterling support to children and their families will continue to be employed.

As I have outlined, the Bracks Labor government, with myself as minister, has an absolute commitment to children with disabilities, to families who support their children, to the specialist children's services team in the Department of Human Services and to a partnership approach with community service organisations. That will inform future directions, and I hope the previous minister, who signed this briefing on 18 July 1997, has learnt the error of his ways. Victorians did not want a competitive tendering environment in community services, they did not want a fee for service environment in community services, and they especially did not want a fee for service in early intervention services. It would do members of the opposition a lot of good if they bothered to listen to what people in this state want and what the government is delivering.

Weeds: control

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — Mr Acting Speaker, the matter I wish to grieve about is the conduct of the government in respect of one of the most important issues in the state in the environmental field — the management and control of weeds.

Government members interjecting.

Mr PERTON — Well! It is interesting! The city-centric ministers who represent Pascoe Vale and Melbourne are laughing about weeds being an important environmental issue. That is why the Minister for Environment and Conservation is having such trouble getting the funding required to control them.

I put on the record, Mr Acting Speaker, that the spontaneous reaction of the city-centric Labor Party ministers, when the important environmental issue of weeds is raised, is that they laugh. That is significant. On the other hand you, Mr Acting Speaker, representing a country electorate, are probably well aware of those issues.

The *Weekly Times* has been running a series of articles for six weeks on the problem of weeds and their

readers' reactions to it. To achieve the end of moving forward by defining the problem and finding solutions, the newspaper interviewed the Minister for Environment and Conservation, Sherryl Garbutt. In order to put some spin on the issue for the government — the issue clearly being out of control so far as the community can see, it having a clear perception that the Labor Party has reduced expenditure on weed control and even stopped expenditure in some regions — the newspaper has asked some explicit questions of the minister. The *Weekly Times* of 21 February reports that the minister was asked:

What do you say to farmers' claims the state government has dramatically slashed funding for weed control programs in Victoria in the past decade?

The minister deftly sidestepped the issue and did not answer the question.

The second question asked was:

Specifically, farmers claim there are not enough DNRE officers to enforce noxious weed control on private land, particularly in the Port Phillip region.

Again the minister sidestepped the issue but said that the government is now spending \$1.25 million under its enhanced enforcement program.

Country communities know that sort of expenditure is chickenfeed. Why? The answer can be easily seen by examining what is probably the best assessment of the cost of weeds to the community produced for the Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) for Weed Management Systems by the Centre for International Economics in September 2000. At page 2 the report states:

Studies estimating the cost of weeds differ markedly according to their coverage and degree of intellectual rigour. Their common feature is the invariably high estimate.

The report goes on to say that according to a study by Jones et al. the cost to agricultural cropping is:

... \$1271 million per year, made up of \$592 million in cultivation costs, \$137 million in herbicides, \$34 million in herbicide application costs, \$422 million in yield losses and \$86 million in product contamination costs. Financial losses from weed incursions in pastures, horticulture and non-crop areas were estimated at \$494 million, \$213 million and \$119 million respectively.

All in all the total cost is some \$3 billion a year, and of that figure roughly a quarter, if not a third, represents losses incurred in Victoria. We are talking about a loss per annum to the Victorian community of \$1 billion a year. The Minister for Housing — a typical member of the Labor Party — and the Minister for Community

Services laugh at that figure. However, it is clear that farmers are not laughing. A figure of \$1.25 million to deal with a problem that is out of control and costing Victoria \$1 billion a year is laughable!

Politicians as a whole have lost a great deal of credibility in the community over the issue. When the Minister for Environment and Conservation was the shadow minister, she went walking across paddocks with farmers in the Bulla area, in Sunbury and Diggers Rest. They showed her evidence of the extent of infestation across their properties by weeds blowing in from neighbouring properties, and they showed her properties with uncontrolled weeds. The then shadow minister expressed great concern and said she would do something to overcome the problem. She has now been the minister for one and a half years and the farmers with whom she went walking across the paddocks have seen no action in this regard at all.

Mr Nardella — Did you talk to them?

Mr PERTON — Indeed. I am glad the honourable member asked that question. I walked with those farmers across those areas and looked at the problem. They said that inspection — —

Mr Nardella — What is the solution?

Mr PERTON — The honourable member for Melton asks what is the solution. I point out for the honourable member's information that the first part of the solution is that a government working in that area needs to be open, honest and accountable.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr PERTON — I am quite happy to answer the question asked by the honourable member for Melton. A study has been conducted for the Bracks government by consultants, who interviewed officers of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, experts in weeds and the community, and gave advice to the government on priorities. I made a freedom of information application for that document, which was refused on the spurious ground that the consultants' report did not reflect government policy. That is bizarre! If all we wanted the Freedom of Information Act to do was reflect government policy, we might as well abolish the act and be content with government press releases.

Government members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! The honourable members for Melton and Frankston East will cease interjecting.

Mr PERTON — The consultants' report — paid for by taxpayers' money — ought to be open to people who are actively fighting weeds out there on their properties and on government land. They need to know why, for instance, the minister is not putting the effort into fighting the precise types of weeds and infestation she promised to fight when she was the opposition spokesperson.

The farmers with whom I, as shadow minister for conservation and environment, walked across that land quite rightly say, 'Sherryl Garbutt walked here before she was minister and promised to do something about it. What are you going to do?'. The implied question is, 'We couldn't believe her; how can we believe you?'.
 Part of the problem is that there are important short-term, medium-term and long-term strategies in the area of weed control. That same 21 February edition of the *Weekly Times* contains a press release provided by Minister Garbutt on a Victorian blackberry strategy which she said would be a 20-year strategy. The problem is that nobody believes Sherryl Garbutt will be the minister for the next two years, much less the next 20 years. How can she provide the community with a strategy that will last for 20 years unless she is prepared to talk to the opposition, involve the National Party and be open and transparent about the documents that form the basis of the government's weed strategy?

The minister's press release talks about a 20-year strategy and commitment. The people who have worked on the Victorian blackberry strategy chaired by Alex Arbuthnot are a terrific bunch of people, including Patrick Pigott and Terry Barnard. The full list can be found in appendix 1 of the strategy. They are all good people.

However, here is the rub. The following paragraph was not contained in the minister's press release, was not given to the *Weekly Times*, and has not been given to the community:

Funding disclaimer

Specific reference to funding levels in this plan are for indicative purposes only. The level of government investment in this plan is contingent on budgets and government priorities.

The minister did not tell the readers of the *Weekly Times* anything about the budget to be applied to the blackberry strategy, and, as I have already said, she has given them no information about what government priorities are in respect of weeds at both a statewide and local level. In other words, it is a complete fraud.

This is a combative Parliament and we do not have traditions of collaboration in long-term policy. However, the opposition is open to a proposal to collaborate with the government. One would have thought that had the minister wanted to produce a 20-year strategy she would at least have had the courtesy to ask the opposition whether it wanted to get involved and to help. Four days before this press release was issued I had my first personal briefing from the minister. It was a good, pleasant meeting and the first time we had attempted such a briefing, but it is absolutely ridiculous that she did not raise this with me at all. The minister did not tell me she was going to the press with a 20-year strategy.

Mr Nardella — Poor diddums.

Mr PERTON — The member for Melton says, ‘Poor diddums’, meaning the government wants to talk bipartisanship in the community, but when the opposition says there is no such thing, members opposite shed crocodile tears. It is bizarre.

When it is elected to government the present opposition will take the weeds issue seriously, unlike the current government. It will recognise that on the basic agriculture statistics weeds are costing the Victorian economy at least \$1 billion a year. If suburban electorates such as that of the Minister for Housing are taken into account it becomes obvious that the problem of weeds is extensive and expensive. The opposition recognises that there are important short, medium and long-term strategies.

I undertake to Parliament to do the reverse of what the minister has done. If in government we look to a 20-year strategy — whether it be on blackberries, serrated tussock or any of the other major weed species affecting this community — we will invite the opposition to participate and to work hard because we know that a 20-year plan needs a commitment from all sides of politics. Such a plan needs agreement on where the strategy is to go and on the amount of money that must be applied across budgets.

The strategies and programs are expensive; they require the agreement of both sides of Parliament. The weeds problem does not require a minister who is hypocritical in her personal conduct: walking across the paddocks promising to solve problems yet doing nothing when she comes to government; and issuing a press release to the *Weekly Times*, which interviewed her in good faith. The minister’s press release of 21 February was headlined ‘Government tackles blackberry pest’ but it does not mention the short paragraph at the end of the strategy document, which states:

Specific reference to funding levels in this plan are for indicative purposes only. The level of government investment in this plan is contingent on budgets and government priorities.

Let the Minister for Environment and Conservation tell the house what she will spend on implementing this strategy! However, before she does that let her come to the opposition and seek agreement on a 20-year budget so that the scourge of blackberry can be eradicated and the government can start to bring Victoria’s weed problem under control. The problem is certainly out of control and has deteriorated in the 18 months the Labor government has been in power.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! The honourable member’s time has expired.

Legislative Council: reform

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I grieve for the lack of commitment among the opposition parties in Parliament to the principles of one vote, one value and an effectively functioning upper house. International experience shows that there is a fundamental dysfunction in Victoria’s parliamentary structure with the current form of the upper house. Not only is there the fundamental insensitivity, which means that a 50 per cent vote for the Labor Party is represented by it holding only 32 per cent of the upper house seats, but there is also international experience that indicates that if an upper house is involved in a pointless repetition and duplication of the functions of the lower house, as Victoria’s upper house is, one needs either a refreshed and up-to-date mandate or a different form of electoral system.

International experience suggests that a staggered electoral system such as that of the Victorian upper house should be associated with proportional representation, fewer powers and a function centring on an ability to delay, reflect on and review bills rather than directly challenging the mandate of the lower house. The lack of commitment of members opposite to those democratic principles should not be news to members in this place.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! The honourable member’s time has expired.

Question agreed to.

Sitting suspended 12.56 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Business: taxes

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I refer the Minister for Major Projects and Tourism to small tourism businesses, such as bed and breakfast operators, across Victoria. Will the minister guarantee that they will not be forced to pay land tax for the first time as a result of the Treasurer's tax report?

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Major Projects and Tourism) — The tax review report has been released by the Treasurer into the public arena. The government wants vigorous debate and discussion on the issue. Tourism in Victoria is much stronger than it was under the former government and is continuing to grow. After debate, the Treasurer will recommend outcomes, which I am sure will be good for Victoria.

Commonwealth Business Forum

Mr LANGUILLER (Sunshine) — I refer the Premier to the importance of promoting Victoria to the international business community. Will he inform the house of the latest major business forum coming to Victoria?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — As the house is aware, Victoria is leading the way on private sector investment. It has a robust and good economy to cope with the mild downturn expected during the coming year. However, it is important that every opportunity is taken to promote Victoria internationally, particularly to our closest neighbours in Asia and our neighbours across the globe. Therefore, I am pleased to announce the selection of Melbourne to host the prestigious Commonwealth Business Forum to be held in October. It is good news for Victoria. The forum is expected to attract some 600 business representatives from commonwealth countries.

The selection of Melbourne as the conference venue builds on the city's great attributes as a financial centre in the Asia-Pacific region and whose global community members are able to attract new investment and new capital. The forum is a major international business event that is held prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, which as most honourable members know will be held in Brisbane in October. The Commonwealth Business Forum will be held between 3 and 5 October at the Melbourne Hilton on the Park hotel as a precursor and lead-up event to CHOGM. I am pleased that Victoria has secured the forum.

The government has been negotiating with the Commonwealth Business Council (CBC) to secure the event for Melbourne. When in London last year I met with the chairman of the council, Lord Cairns, to push Melbourne's case, which I regarded as strong. That meeting ultimately led to today's announcement.

The government will pay particular attention to opportunities afforded to Victoria from the forum in new and emerging markets, such as India, South Africa and Malaysia. The forum will be held over three days and will include many private sector, public and government speakers.

The Commonwealth Business Forum is a prestigious forum. Previously it has been held in Johannesburg, Ottawa and last year in London. The CBC was established during CHOGM in October 1997 for the promotion of international investment and collegiate arrangements between businesses in the commonwealth countries. It is led by a management board of 12 business leaders drawn from all regions of the commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Business Forum is a fantastic opportunity for Victoria. It is a good news story to sell. Victoria has a robust community with a robust economy, which message will be strongly delivered at the Commonwealth Business Forum in October.

Barley: industry deregulation

Mr STEGGALL (Swan Hill) — I refer the Minister for Agriculture to reports that Japan is expressing concerns about the deregulation of the Victorian barley industry and has threatened to take business amounting to \$160 million elsewhere. I further refer the minister to the decision last year to canvass the views of dairy farmers about deregulation of that industry. Why will the minister not afford Victorian barley growers the same opportunity to express their views on the single export desk for barley?

Mr HAMILTON (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the honourable member for Swan Hill for his question — a somewhat surprising question, showing that he and other members of the National Party have had a sudden change of heart. They sat here mutely when the then Kennett government passed this regulation through the house, which in fact determined that the piece of legislation would sunset in June this year. The Victorian government, as is proper, made a whole-of-government decision that that piece of legislation would not be amended; therefore, the sunset will take place on 30 June this year.

It is interesting and quite strange. Here is the National Party, the atypical agrarian socialists — of some time past, perhaps — arguing a case that involves a grower-owned, private company that is not a government authority. The comments made about the private business between ABB Export and the Japanese government authority that regulates barley imports are a complete red herring. Indeed, I guess those on the other side of the house would be the first to object strongly if the government started to intervene in the way another government does its business.

In fact, I am surprised that a company such as ABB Export wants to make its private business public. It would be most surprising if, with confidential arrangements made between it and a private company in Australia, an agent acting on behalf of the Japanese government wanted its information splashed all over the pages of the media. This is a strange outcome. It is contradictory and very strange that the National Party, of all parties, wants to advertise the fact that it has so clearly lost touch with country Victoria.

Drugs: penalties

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I refer the Attorney-General to the government’s commitment to be tough on drug dealers and ask him to inform the house whether the government has any plans to increase sentences for large-scale drug traffickers.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — As many people would know, the Bracks government had a pre-election policy called ‘A safe and just society’ that includes a proposal to introduce tougher penalties for convicted commercial drug traffickers. This government is, of course, as I am sure are all members of this house, very concerned about the scourge of drugs on the Victorian community, and it has been very clear in its intention to clamp down on drug traffickers. Large-scale drug traffickers peddle in death and misery, affecting hundreds of individuals and families.

Today the government has announced a range of measures targeting those convicted of large-scale drug trafficking. The first of these measures is to introduce a new category of large-scale commercial trafficking, carrying a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Currently the maximum penalty for commercial trafficking is 25 years. Large-scale commercial trafficking will be defined under the new legislation as any amount more than 750 grams of pure heroin, cocaine or amphetamines. The legislation will also apply to marijuana and a range of other hard drugs.

The new maximum penalty of life imprisonment should warn potential offenders of the price they could pay if they traffic in drugs. In addition, the penalty reflects the abhorrence with which the general community regards drug trafficking.

The second measure the government is introducing is designed to close a loophole that currently allows some drug traffickers to escape being charged with commercial trafficking.

Currently separate parcels of different drugs cannot be added together, so that if you have amounts of drugs, each of which is less than a commercial quantity, you cannot be charged with trafficking in a commercial quantity. The government will change that situation to allow for amounts of different drugs to be aggregated to determine whether there is a commercial or large commercial quantity of drugs being trafficked.

It is known that Victoria’s confiscation laws are among the toughest in Australia. The current provisions will be extended to cover the new category of trafficking in a large commercial quantity. That will mean that property can be restrained pending conviction, and on conviction that property will be forfeited unless a defendant can prove that the property was lawfully acquired or that it was not used for unlawful purposes — that is, a reverse onus situation. The pecuniary penalty for trafficking in large commercial quantities will increase from \$250 000 to \$500 000.

Finally, the proposed measures send a strong message to the Mr Bigs of drug trafficking that their lifetime of liberty is seriously at risk if they continue to trade in death and misery. The Bracks government will not tolerate trafficking in drugs to the community and will act to protect the safety and security of Victorian citizens.

Business: taxes

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I refer the Premier to the article by Tim Colebatch in today’s *Age*, which calls the Treasurer’s tax report ‘socially regressive’. The article further says that the report’s losers heavily outnumber the winners, with the losers being 240 000 small businesses. Will the Premier immediately rule out changes to land tax that will disadvantage small businesses across Victoria?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — As honourable members know, the biggest impact on small business in Victoria has been from the goods and services tax (GST), which has been supported by honourable members on that side of the house. If members opposite want some evidence they can look at the Yellow Pages

business index summary released yesterday. The summary shows that during the last quarter there was a substantial decline in support for the federal government's policies among small and medium-sized enterprises, with 45 per cent regarding those policies as working against them, and reflects GST compliance costs and rising fuel costs. Those are the biggest issues — some 45 per cent of small businesses say the biggest issues are petrol prices and the GST.

I turn to land tax. The former honourable member for Brighton, who used to sit on this side of the house as the Treasurer, reduced the threshold for land tax from \$200 000 to \$85 000, capturing some 70 000 new Victorian taxpayers under the former Kennett government's land tax arrangements. Perhaps the current honourable member for Brighton did not notice that change, because over the past 12 months she has presided over an unprecedented proposed spending spree by the opposition parties in Victoria. One can look at what the shadow Treasurer failed to scrutinise — some \$4.4 billion of expenditure last year.

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the rules and practices of the house that provide that a person answering a question should not debate it and should answer with relevant information. I put it to you, Mr Speaker, that the Premier is clearly debating the question. I ask you to direct his attention to the rules of the house.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. I remind the Premier of his obligation not to debate the question and I ask him to conclude his answer.

Mr BRACKS — I refer to the proposals from the new honourable member for Brighton on land tax where she says that not only should there be a \$400 million reduction, but there should be an \$800 million reduction. Is that right? As well as saying there should be an \$800 million reduction in tax, her party is proposing more than \$4.4 billion of new expenditure. What a shadow Treasurer! I agree with the honourable member for Eltham on this point.

Ms Asher — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, on the question of relevance I asked the Premier a simple question. I simply want an answer to my question about what he will do about land tax.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order raised by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition on relevance. The Premier was being relevant. However, I again remind the Premier of the need not to

debate the question and I ask him to come back to answering the question.

Mr BRACKS — In conclusion, the Harvey tax review is an independent review by representatives of the business community. It is open for public debate and dialogue. After we have that open dialogue the government will examine the report and will respond to it. The shallow and hopeless questions from the honourable member for Brighton only lead me to one conclusion — that the honourable member for Eltham is right!

Hospitals: funding

Mr VINEY (Frankston East) — Will the Minister for Health advise on public hospital performance in the light of shortages of commonwealth nursing home beds and increased numbers of emergency patients admitted to hospitals?

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — In seven years the Kennett government took out more than \$500 million from the public hospital system. Opposition members do not like being told that. Even the shadow Minister for Health has admitted that 'we did cut too far too fast'. That is what he said.

The government is rebuilding the system. In the recent budget the government put \$176 million of new money into hospitals. It has improved viability by additional funding through casemix. An extra \$34 million has been put into financial viability because of the way — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mornington is far too loud.

Mr THWAITES — The government has funded an extra 360 beds in hospitals and is employing another 1300 nurses. We have always said that the destruction brought about during the seven years of the Kennett government cannot be fixed overnight. Just like the Kennett government, the Howard federal government is showing it does not care. Victoria is 4000 nursing home beds short of the national average, which is having an enormous effect on our public hospitals. In January, 387 patients who had already been assessed as needing a nursing home bed were waiting in hospital beds.

That is the equivalent of a whole hospital the size of the Alfred waiting for a bed. What is even more extraordinary is that the nursing home patients, who had already been assessed as needing Howard government nursing home beds, had been waiting

15 848 days in our public hospitals. It is creating a huge blockage and means that people who need an operation on a knee or a hip cannot get it.

The shortage of nursing home beds is occurring at the same time as there is a huge — 7 per cent — increase in the number of emergency patients. Hospitals are unable to treat their elective surgery patients because they are having to cope with nursing home patients, and it is having an effect on their casemix funding. Melbourne hospitals now face running a deficit on their casemix funding. They are unable to do what they were set up to do because they are doing what the Howard government should be doing. This government is taking responsibility for doing what the Howard government should be doing.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Monbulk!

Mr THWAITES — A number of hospitals are facing particular financial issues as a hangover from the previous administration. Women's and Children's Health is facing financial concerns, although the hospital says it is turning the situation around. It is turning a \$9 million casemix deficit into a position where it will be in balance. The hospital is doing the right thing.

The outer eastern hospitals are facing the same situation because for years they were plundered and their beds were closed by the previous government.

An Opposition Member — Build more hospitals!

Mr THWAITES — The opposition says 'build more hospitals', and that is what the government is doing. The previous government closed 12 hospitals, sacked nurses and cut funds, but this government is building new hospitals, putting on more nurses and putting in more funds.

Women's and Children's Health

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — I refer the Minister for Health to his previous answer and ask: can he explain why Women's and Children's Health, which is not affected by nursing home places, had a \$6.5 million operating surplus in July 1999 but has a \$9 million deficit at the moment?

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — A report into these matters has indicated that the financial management under the previous administration was inconsistent — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the house to come to order. I ask particularly the honourable members for Doncaster and Wantirna to cease interjecting. The Chair needs to hear the minister's answer, as indeed do all honourable members.

Mr THWAITES — As I was saying, the report indicates that the previous administration was inconsistent and lacked an understanding of financial principles.

Federation Square

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — Will the Minister for Major Projects and Tourism inform the house of the outcome of the review of the north-west corner of the Federation Square project?

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Major Projects and Tourism) — Today I had the pleasure of making a public announcement about the new building on the north-west corner of Federation Square. The site will be a key icon for Victoria. The design, which has been announced, will include an 8-metre tall building that tapers off to 6 metres instead of the 22-metre building planned previously.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — The building will be the new info hub. I thank the City of Melbourne on its decision last night to make the info hub the home of Melbourne's newest visitor information centre. The great thing about it is that it is a win-win situation. It preserves the design — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Glen Waverley!

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — The design preserves the heritage view of St Paul's Cathedral and provides a fantastic new welcoming entrance to Federation Square.

The intersection of Swanston and Flinders streets is Melbourne's busiest intersection, with about 63 million people passing through it each year. About 6 million of those people will visit Federation Square and about 600 000 visitors will use the new visitor information centre facilities that will be placed there.

The 8-metre building will be constructed predominantly of glass, zinc and steel, making it a very attractive

design and a particularly striking feature at night. However, there is more good news.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — As Federation Square continues to grow, those who have been watching the day-to-day developments will see that the construction will be but a small part of the completed project. The additional good news is that the changed design is expected to reduce the construction costs by approximately \$1 million.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the honourable member for Mordialloc!

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — The visitor information centre at the info hub will provide information about Melbourne and Victoria, a tours information and booking service, accommodation and reservation services, access to toilets and change rooms, event information and ticket sales. The City of Melbourne staff and volunteers will operate the centre.

This is the place through which so many visitors to the state will pass. Once completed, Federation Square, with the riverside park next door, will be the quickest access point to the sporting precincts of Melbourne — the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Melbourne and Olympic parks. More visitors will see that the info hub is the place to obtain directions to plan trips around Melbourne and Victoria — around what is the place to be!

The new tenancy arrangement with the City of Melbourne is one of the final tenancies to be negotiated for Federation Square. After years of mismanagement by the previous government, Federation Square is finally happening. The square has become a monument to mismanagement, gross overruns and delays.

When the history books are written about the Federation Square project it will be obvious that the Bracks government inherited a monumental mess. But the government has knocked it into shape, made it happen and it will become the icon it was intended to be. Parts of the project will open later this year and \$338 million has been budgeted to complete the works.

Business: taxes

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — Will the Premier guarantee that no small business in Victoria will be worse off as a result of the Treasurer's tax plan?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — As I indicated in a previous answer to the honourable member for Brighton, the government is committed to an independent review of taxes in the state. As the house would know, the first comprehensive business tax review for about 20 years was conducted by an independent group, including senior business people, the head of the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry and others, and the group has now produced a report. The government is examining the report's outcomes and recommendations, as well as the input into and comments made in the recommendations. I reiterate that the only party that is anti-small business is Howard's supporters on the opposition benches!

Dr Napthine — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Premier is failing to answer the question. The question was: will the Premier guarantee that no small business will be worse off? The answer should be a simple yes or no. Clearly, he cannot give that guarantee — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Brumby — He could not even spell it!

The SPEAKER — Order! The Treasurer!

I do not uphold the point of order, and I will not allow even the Leader of the Opposition to use the taking of a point of order to repeat his question.

Mr BRACKS — I reiterate that the only party that has not stood up against the GST — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — You wonder whether the Leader of the Opposition or the honourable member for Brighton have had any correspondence on the business activity statement.

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr BRACKS — Did you? Have you ever written to the federal Treasurer? Have you ever stood up for small business?

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier!

Mr BRACKS — Yesterday the independent Yellow Pages *Small Business Index* showed that 45 per cent of people say that the GST and petrol prices are the big issues of small business. The Howard supporters have done nothing except be complacent in that GST change!

Aged care: funding

Mr CARLI (Coburg) — Will the Minister for Aged Care inform the house of the government's response to the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2001*, which highlighted the fact that Victoria is receiving less commonwealth aged care funding for its elderly population than any other state?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Aged Care) — Figures in successive Productivity Commission reports have alarmed the government and the community because they show that for several years the federal government has been discriminating against Victoria when it comes to aged care funding. Therefore, today I am announcing an additional \$8.3 million funding by the Bracks government for frail, older Victorians and people with disabilities who need home and community care (HACC) services.

Across Victoria 282 agencies will benefit from this additional funding. It meets the government's election commitment to expand services and is part of a \$41 million package over the next four years that has been committed by the Bracks government. The government is meeting its commitment to further assist adult day groups: \$3.12 million will help 140 adult day groups, there will be \$2.5 million for expansion of services such as home care and Meals on Wheels, and \$2.7 million to deal with run-down infrastructure.

Most importantly, the additional dollars will benefit people who have missed out in the past: people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, people who are at risk of homelessness and people in rural and regional areas. As honourable members have heard, the Productivity Commission has identified that in the past five years the Howard government's funding for aged care in Victoria has fallen a long way behind the needs. The government has written countless letters of protest to Canberra and has met with the minister. Its pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

It is an indisputable fact that Victoria has less aged care funding, less growth funding in HACC and fewer nursing home beds than any other state in Australia. The Productivity Commission has identified that very clearly. But how did it come about? It came about partly because in the 1990s those opposite locked this state into funding arrangements that were most inequitable and were not really going to help the community.

In a spirit of bipartisanship and of doing something for Victorians it is high time that the opposition used its influence with the Howard government in Canberra to

put an end to this unfair discrimination against the Victorian community. It would be a good start if the opposition could get the Howard government to match these additional dollars. The government is putting in \$41 million of Victorian state government money over the next four years and at this stage the commonwealth has said it will not match that additional money. The commonwealth government is short-changing Victorians by \$60 million. It is high time that those opposite used their influence with people in Canberra to ensure that Victoria gets its fair share.

LIQUOR CONTROL REFORM (AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 with respect to packaged liquor licences, certain general licences and the licensing of petrol stations and for other purposes.

Mrs PEULICH (Bentleigh) — I ask the minister to provide a detailed description of the bill.

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (*By leave*) — The purpose of the bill is to deliver a Labor election commitment to close a loophole in respect of the 8 per cent ceiling on liquor retail licences that the previous Minister for Small Business refused to close.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

PROSTITUTION CONTROL (PROSCRIBED BROTHELS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Prostitution Control Act 1994 in respect of the procedure for declaring premises to be a proscribed brothel, and for other purposes.

Dr DEAN (Berwick) — I ask the minister to give an outline of this bill.

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (*By leave*) — The purpose of the bill is to deal with a Magistrates Court ruling on the

declaration of a proscribed brothel, where the magistrate had ruled that the brothel had to be trading as a brothel at the particular time of the matter being before court. It virtually makes the law unenforceable and the bill deals with that particular anomaly.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

CONSTITUTION (SUPREME COURT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Constitution Act 1995, the Supreme Court Act 1986, the Magistrates' Court Act 1989, and Magistrates' Court (Infringements) Act 2000, and for other purposes.

Dr DEAN (Berwick) — Will the minister give an outline of the bill?

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) (By leave) — This bill does a number of things, but in the main its aim is to give more flexibility to the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. It will allow Court of Appeal judges, when available, to sit in on the trial division of the Supreme Court. As the honourable member would know, judges from the Supreme Court can go up to the Court of Appeal; they cannot go the other way. This bill will enable them to do that.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

WATER (AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Water Act 1989 and for other purposes.

Mr McARTHUR (Monbulk) — Will the minister provide the house with a brief outline of the contents of the bill?

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) (By leave) — The bill makes some changes to waterway and flood management responsibilities of some catchment management authorities, and also fixes up some problems created by the previous government.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

POLICE REGULATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 23 November 2000; motion of Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services)

Government amendments circulated by Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) pursuant to sessional orders.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr WELLS (Wantirna).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

HEALTH SERVICES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 16 November 2000; motion of Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health).

Government amendments circulated by Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) pursuant to sessional orders.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr DOYLE (Malvern).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

RACING AND BETTING ACTS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 26 October 2000; motion of Mr HULLS (Minister for Racing).

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — It is with pride and satisfaction that I take part in the debate on the Racing and Betting Acts (Amendment) Bill, and in particular refer to its relevance to the south-western district I represent. It has often been stated that the Irish and English settled that area early and that the first piece of infrastructure was the racing track, followed by the pub, the hospital, the school, and so on. The passion for racing in the area is ever present, as the minister would have noted when he has attempted to influence the outcome of racing issues since Labor came to power. He would have felt the ire of people involved in racing.

One of the toughest things I ever had to do was hand in my owner-trainer's licence prior to my entering Parliament. I had been involved in the thoroughbred racing industry as an owner and trainer for some 15 years and spent my leisure time in the mornings at the racetrack with the jockeys, owners and trainers. I treasured that time and now miss it greatly. Who knows — perhaps one day I may return to that leisure activity!

Racing, like politics, produces very high and very low points in life, and I was fortunate to be able to train a few good horses in my career. One horse, a hurdler called Brandy For Mum — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MULDER — Yes, he had a good name, but my mum was not all that happy when the horse turned up at home! She said the ladies at St Vincent's were wondering whether I had named the horse after her and whether she had a drinking problem. As the horse progressed he put together five extremely good wins over hurdles: two at Ballarat, one at Kilmore, the Ansett Steeplechase at Hamilton and, luckily enough, one of the big jumping races at Oakbank. That final win was, for me, a great achievement and demonstrated that in racing, unlike football where a club can buy the best players, anyone can turn up with a champion.

On that day at Oakbank the highlight for me was weighing in and looking down the line to see Colin Hayes with a horse owned by Robert Sangster. Battlers can still make it in racing, irrespective of how much money other people have to spend. I think I spent about \$500 on that horse. Not until I got him home did I realise that on the road he could run more quickly backwards than forwards. We spent many mornings tangled up in drains and fences before I could get him going. We had a lot of fun with Brandy.

The low point in my racing life was with another horse I had, this one called Plus Don. Just before I entered Parliament and after six months hard work and assistance from my wife, I took him to a hurdle race at Warracknabeal. Two jumps from the finish the jockey slipped off the horse in between the two jumps. There was a lot of conjecture around the racecourse that day, and the stewards ran around busily. I ended up in Melbourne attending a couple of inquiries into what actually happened. The jockey was eventually given the benefit of the doubt and was judged to have slipped from the horse and not to have cocked the leg. As for me, when the horses entered the straight I was feeling in my pocket for the betting ticket and looking at the

prize money — I had it all parcelled up! As I said, racing produces highs and lows.

I have seen some entertaining events on racecourses. One day I was at a country race meeting when a punter and a bookmaker, one of the smallest men on the course, were having an argument. The bookmaker called out board odds and 'Give them a name'. Just as he finished that call he let go with a right hook, dropped the punter onto his back and then continued calling out. You see some funny things at the track!

Lou Toth, a well-known jockey from the western district, rode a horse for me at Mortlake one day. About 100 metres from the post he made a run and looked like he was going to win, but then with only 50 metres to go he stood up like a shire grader driver and did not move. The horse dropped back to about third last. When he got back to the mounting enclosure he explained that the horse on his inside had tried to savage him and had pulled the bridle off his horse's head, so he had no steering gear for the last 50 metres of the race.

I have been on a turf club committee in country Victoria for about 15 years. Country racing is exploding in popularity. Over the past two or three years gate takings at Colac race meetings have doubled and doubled again, due mainly to the people introduced into country racing by the Victorian Country Racing Council (VCRC) to assist with the marketing of country clubs. In the past that assistance had always been available only to metropolitan clubs.

Racing carnivals in Victoria have done well. As they developed they created a huge amount of interest, not only throughout Australia but internationally. Our carnivals have created an industry in its own right, involving not only racing but breeding, with the shuttle stallions arriving from overseas. People are now very keen to put their money into racing as an investment.

I congratulate the Victorian Country Racing Council for the work it has done to ensure that country racing does not die. The club at Colac was earmarked for closure 15 years ago, but thanks to a grant of \$20 000 from the VCRC at that time, the club turned around and became one of the most successful in Victoria. That was brought about by the change in attitude of the industry to country racing and its preparedness to invest in country racing.

The annual review of the racing industry contains some interesting figures on the industry. The industry has fought off many challenges over the years both from individuals and other forms of entertainment. Victoria is leading the way in Australia. The international racing

industry rankings have Australia 12th, but Victoria 4th, headed only by the United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong and Japan. The hard work undertaken by the industry over many years has paid dividends and has underpinned the industry and enabled it to look forward to the next decade with confidence.

In 1999–2000 returns to owners increased by \$8.3 million, an 8 per cent increase. Since 1994 returns to owners have increased by 87 per cent. The racing industry is on the way up. It understands that it is part of the entertainment industry, not just the racing industry. As long as the industry continues to view its customers and clients in that manner, racing will continue to grow.

The bill proposes to expand the membership of the Harness Racing Board from five to seven members. This provision relates to both quorum and expertise issues. I believe harness and greyhound racing will follow along the same lines as the thoroughbred racing industry and will focus on marketing and bringing on to their committees people with the expertise and ability to improve the patronage of their clubs.

The bill will provide racing participants with the right of appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal when there is a refusal of an application for a licence, the renewal of a licence, the revoking of a licence, the imposing of conditions on a licence, varying or revoking a condition or refusing to vary or revoke a condition. I was a victim of this process when I first applied for a trainer's licence. I was refused a licence by the Victoria Racing Club because I did not come from a racing family or have a history in the racing industry. The club considered that I needed to sharpen up some of my skills. I worked with a professional racehorse trainer for six months to gain some skills, after which I reapplied and had my licence granted.

Often trainers want an endorsement on their licence to train jumpers. Unless people can demonstrate to the racing body that they have undertaken sufficient training and can demonstrate a sound knowledge for training a jumping horse, their licence may be refused.

The racing industry refuses about 100 licences a year — an extraordinary amount considering that the harness and greyhound racing industries do not refuse anything like that number. In the past the issuing of licences to people who have not had the skills has caused the industry some embarrassment. People training in the picnic circuit or owner-trainers who have produced a winner apply to enter the industry on a full-time basis. Some of those people may damage the

industry and cause injury to others. The racing industry requires a range of skills that it wants people to have before being issued with a full-time racing licence. It wants people to have qualifications in occupational health and safety, accounting, marketing, animal drug health and the general ability to run a business in their own right.

It does the racing industry and those working in it no good to have people who cannot manage a business enter the industry. Racing is a business and if people want to run a racing stable with 12 to 15 horses they require business skills. I have seen many people who may appear to be poor trainers but who survive because of their marketing and accounting skills, and others who are able to get a horse to win a race but who fail because they do not have the necessary marketing and financial skills. I understand the tribunal will have the power to seek advice from people who have the appropriate skills.

The bill proposes to change the jurisdiction of the Racing Appeals Tribunal by varying the tribunal's jurisdiction so that it can hear only penalty decisions. It will have no jurisdiction to hear appeals against business decisions of the controlling bodies unrelated to the operation of the rules of racing such as the awarding of commercial contracts, or against administrative licensing decisions such as the refusing to grant a licence. It will provide that persons appealing against drug-related offence penalties imposed by the stewards may appeal directly to the tribunal rather than have to be first heard by the Victoria Racing Club. It will also allow stewards to appeal to the tribunal against an appeal hearing decision of the controlling bodies regarding a penalty originally imposed by the stewards — for example, stewards may receive new information on new claims being made regarding a penalty.

The bill proposes to transfer the registration function from the National Coursing Association of Victoria to the Greyhound Racing Control Board. The NCAV operates in the same building as the GRCB, with a partition separating the two bodies. Both organisations have been consulted about the arrangement and agree with the outcome.

The bill will make it an offence to conduct promotional and administrative activities in connection with betting. In order to bypass gaming taxes and costs in Victoria some operators have established their operations offshore.

Vanuatu is one of the most popular locations for establishing a betting shop. The operators establish a

betting shop in a place like Vanuatu. They then establish a settlement house in Victoria and the promotional work is also carried out via the settlement house in Victoria. The arrangement allows people to bet overseas but conduct the settlement in Victoria and circumnavigate the Victorian taxation system and its ability to collect taxes on those bets.

The legislation makes operating a settlement shop or advertising offshore betting illegal. In some regards it will curtail betting. However, it is not possible to stop it. The problem is to detect people carrying out these types of operations. If they go underground will the police have the resources to track them down and shut them down altogether? The facts are that people cannot be stopped from betting in Vanuatu and operators will make arrangements for settlements to be made other than through a settlement house.

One settlement house operates out of Yarrawonga and another out of Melbourne, but it will be difficult to totally curtail their activities. An upper house member, the Honourable Ian Cover, and I met with representatives of the operators, who claimed they are currently seeking advice on the legislation interfering with an operation that lies offshore and therefore being unconstitutional. I thought that a long bow. The second claim was that the Victorian government may have a diplomatic role to play in supporting a third world country such as Vanuatu — an even longer shot. They claimed they had made several approaches to the minister on the issue without success. I quote from a letter to Robert Hulls, MP, Racing Minister:

As formerly indicated we wish to contribute to the good of Victorian racing. To that end we propose to offer the sum of \$250 000 annually for consideration in allowing our administrative office to continue functioning.

Not a bad offer, \$250 000. They perhaps should have engaged the services of Richo — perhaps the Gladstone bag slid under the table may have been a better way to approach and do business with the government. The \$250 000 has not been considered by the government, but as I say a different approach may have worked bearing in mind the government's preparedness to accept sums of money for favourable decisions.

The bill proposes to deregulate minor race meetings. In the past some restrictions were placed on minor race meetings prohibiting the conduct of mixed sports within 25 kilometres of the Melbourne General Post Office and prohibiting participation in races by Victoria Racing Club-licensed jockeys and Harness Racing Board drivers. The payment of prize money at picnic race meetings was also prohibited and participation was restricted to VRC-approved amateur and picnic riders.

At restricted harness race meetings prize money was limited to \$500 per race with a maximum of \$5000 for the entire meeting.

Many years ago when I first took a horse to compete at the picnic races prize money was not allowed. A trophy was offered. When I went to collect my trophy it turned out to be \$100 in an envelope with 'Your trophy' written on the front. So, the industry has circumnavigated that process very well.

The bill deals with a number of other housekeeping issues. In the main it addresses a number of matters that the thoroughbred, greyhound and harness racing industries would be happy to endorse. I will not touch on other issues as I know we have a tight legislative program. I wish the bill a speedy passage through the house.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — It is with great pleasure that I follow the honourable member for Polwarth in remarking on the Racing and Betting Acts (Amendment) Bill, and I indicate that the National Party will not oppose the legislation.

The legislation amends the Racing Act, the Lotteries, Gaming and Betting Act and the Gaming and Betting Act. At the start I want to say that, unlike the honourable member for Polwarth, I do not consider myself a betting or a racing man. However, I enjoy thoroughbred racing and harness racing, and I am pleased therefore to make some contribution to the debate today.

Firstly, harness racing — I enjoy attending the meetings, particularly those run by the Echuca Harness Racing Club, which is a family-oriented club. It puts on an excellent spectacle, and on a nice spring or autumn evening there is nothing better than to go to the harness racing in Echuca and have a pleasant evening out. It is a good country club built up by voluntary members. It has magnificent grounds and facilities only a short distance from my home. I pay tribute to the committee that has run the club for so many years, particularly Frank Ryan, the secretary, and Gary Petrini, the current president.

That is my experience of harness racing, although I have on a number of occasions attended harness racing at Moonee Valley, and I enjoy the spectacle. I am a casual attender at thoroughbred race meetings, which again I very much enjoy. That started with my involvement years ago as president of the Pakenham Agricultural Society when it relocated to the Pakenham racecourse.

I then built up a long association with the Bourke family, and David Bourke in particular, who was not only a secretary of the Pakenham Agricultural Society and the Pakenham Racing Club but who also rose through the country racing ranks to become chairman of the Victoria Racing Club. He was a very good chairman, as the industry would acknowledge.

Another person I had many dealings with at that time was the late Peter Ronald, who was also a chairman of the Pakenham Racing Club, the Pakenham Agricultural Society, the Royal Agricultural Society and the Victoria Racing Club.

I had my first introduction to racing through David Bourke and Peter Ronald. I have continued my interest and involvement in it since then, although not on a regular basis and in particular with racing at Echuca, where I will be attending a race meeting on 11 March. I pay tribute to the members and committee of the Echuca Racing Club, who have transformed what was a typical country track into one that now attracts people from all over Victoria to its excellent facilities. I attend the Echuca Racing Club to enjoy the social activities and spectacle it provides, and to support the excellent work the club has done.

Another racing club in my electorate is the Gunbower Race Club, which runs an annual event not to be missed. It is a great spectacle and a great occasion, to which people come from all over Victoria. I was very pleased to be at the Gunbower Race Club on 6 January to hear the legendary Jack Styring give his 50th successive call there and to hear him use the phrases that had become so familiar to those present. As the leading horse came around the back of the straight, Jack said, 'And there it is, baring its molars to the breeze'. I remember on a previous occasion Jack lost the favourite as it was coming around the track and missed it in his call. He rarely loses a horse, but on that occasion he did and was most embarrassed. The next year he was following the same horse in his call and said, 'I've still got the bugger in my sights and I'm not going to let him get away this year!'. It was a typical Jack Styring call. The Gunbower Race Club means quite a lot to me.

The racing industry overall — harness, thoroughbred and greyhound racing — is a large and important industry providing employment as well as enjoyment and social activity for the people of Victoria. Collectively the industry provides employment for trainers, breeders, bloodstock agents, stockfeed producers and transport workers. The racing clubs employ gardeners, administrative staff and turf keepers, and so on. It also provides employment opportunities in

the catering, accommodation, gambling, and food and beverage industries. The racing industry employs approximately 30 000 people throughout the state and has a turnover of hundreds of millions of dollars per annum. I am not sure what the exact figure is, but I suspect it would be well over \$1 billion, given that the Spring Racing Carnival alone is worth \$230 million to the Victorian economy.

Racing supports a large and worthwhile industry and is an important part of life outside the metropolitan area. Many of the professional people involved in horse racing — the owners, trainers and jockeys — live and work in country Victoria. Given the size of the gambling industry associated with thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing, it is of vital importance that all three codes are subject to good governance so that the small punters, the large punters and the bookies can all be assured they will get a fair go and a fair run for their money. The general public must be assured that races are run and won by the horses or dogs, as the case may be, on their merits and not as a result of the administration of any special stimulants, and that the probity and honesty of the racing industry is above reproach.

I acknowledge the large number of thoroughbred and harness racing enthusiasts located in country Victoria who get a great deal of pleasure and enjoyment out of training their own horses. I see dedicated people very close to where I live getting up at the crack of dawn every morning to work their horses, in addition to running their farming and businesses activities. I have witnessed the pleasure they get when, after all their hard work, they are ultimately rewarded by watching their horse win a race. I can also appreciate the thrill and pleasure that must come from winning a major race.

The bill does essentially four things, and I will deal briefly with each as I go through the bill. Firstly, it increases the number of members on the board of Harness Racing Victoria from five to seven. That is a good move and is welcomed by the industry.

The existing legislation allows for the Harness Racing Board's membership to be made up, firstly, of a chairperson; that position was previously occupied by Ian McEwan and is currently vacant. The board is then to have one person with experience in business, and that is currently James Henderson. It is to have one person with experience in marketing, and that is Prue Lovell, and two people with experience in the harness racing industry, and they are Joe Beder and Michael Brennan.

The bill proposes to extend the board membership from five to seven. I welcome that change, and I understand that the industry as a whole also welcomes it. The board will now be made up of the chairperson and three people who have experience in business or marketing, which is important. Most importantly, the board will include three people who have experience in the harness racing industry. The bill will also extend the quorum from three to four. These changes are covered in clauses 11 and 12 of the bill.

In dealing with the extension of the board membership I appeal to the government to seriously consider making it mandatory to have a minimum number of people from country Victoria on the board. The harness racing industry is particularly strongly based in country Victoria. The industry generates revenue in the order of \$578 million a year, about 75 per cent of which is generated in country Victoria, yet in the past seven years there has not been a single person on that board based in country Victoria. This government has talked about its commitment to country Victoria and to giving country Victoria a better deal. It is very important that the government put that rhetoric into action on this piece of legislation and make it mandatory for at least two — some people would say three — members of the seven-person Harness Racing Board to come from country Victoria, given that the majority of the industry's revenue is generated there.

It is reasonable to say that during the past seven years there has been considerable conflict between the Harness Racing Board and some country harness racing clubs. Many members would be aware of meetings that have been held in Parliament House to try to resolve some of those issues. I acknowledge that the Harness Racing Board was charged with increasing harness racing's share of the tote revenue and that that was not an easy task. The board needed to build its marketing and promotion skills to try to increase the industry's share of that gambling dollar.

The industry was driven to do that, like most sports, by the demands of television. The board has concentrated on targeting a small number of tracks for major upgrades. In the process it has disadvantaged a number of country clubs, including my local club of Echuca, which missed out. As I mentioned earlier, the Echuca Harness Racing Club was built on the hard work of the volunteers. Over many years enthusiastic people have contributed to the building of a wonderful facility, and it is a little galling for them to find that \$5 million to \$6 million in development funds is being spent on tracks like those at Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and Cranbourne. The Echuca club gets more people through the gate and generates more turnover on the TAB than

other clubs and has higher stakes in many cases, but has had less than \$500 000 spent on it over the past seven or eight years.

There has been some disquiet in the harness racing industry, particularly among the country clubs that have missed out on upgrades and seen clubs in Shepparton, Bendigo and Ballarat treated more generously in terms of the development of their facilities. To that degree I welcome the reform of the Harness Racing Board and the fact that there will be a new chairman and two more members to give new impetus to the board.

The second main strand of this bill is the provision of a right of appeal against decisions of the racing governing bodies, the Victoria Racing Club, the Harness Racing Board and the Greyhound Racing Control Board. The Racing Act 1958 established the Racing Appeals Tribunal to hear appeals by racing industry participants against certain penalty decisions. I am referring to things like fines, suspensions and disqualifications imposed by the VRC, the Harness Racing Board and the Greyhound Racing Control Board or their stewards.

However, the current legislation provides no right of appeal for people who have effectively had their licence to earn a living suspended or disqualified. This bill intends to rectify that anomaly. I welcome that because the jockeys, trainers and owners have a big stake in the industry and should have a right to appeal against decisions that adversely affect their livelihoods. The bill will provide racing industry participants with a right of appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in relation to a decision of one of the three governing authorities to refuse an application for a licence or for a renewal of a licence; to revoke a licence; or to impose a condition on a licence, vary or revoke a condition or refuse to vary or revoke a condition on a licence. This also applies to bookmakers. I welcome that as a step in the right direction.

The third function of the legislation applies to greyhound registration. Section 78 of the Racing Act empowers the National Coursing Association of Victoria to perform the function of registering greyhounds. The bill proposes to transfer the registration function to the Greyhound Racing Control Board, which is to be known as Greyhound Racing Victoria. Those proposals are set out in clauses 15, 16, 17, 18 and 27.

The fourth major strand of the legislation deregulates minor race meetings. The 1958 Racing Act effectively prohibits the conduct of mixed sports gatherings within 25 kilometres of the Melbourne General Post Office and prohibits participation in races within 25 kilometres

of the GPO by Victoria Racing Club-licensed jockeys and Harness Racing Board drivers. If that is not a restriction on open competition and fair play I do not know what is, and clauses 3(1)(b), 3(1)(c), 3(2), 6 and 24 will remove those restrictions. The anachronism is long overdue for removal, and I welcome the change.

A meeting was held in Shepparton either last week or earlier this week with representatives from the harness racing industry who were briefed on the launch of plans for harness racing over the next five years. They were impressed with the plans setting out where the harness racing industry is heading over the next five years. It was acknowledged that the origins of the harness racing industry were in the country and the country was likely to receive a better deal from the present expanded board than it has received during the past seven or eight years under the former board.

I welcome the changes made by the legislation and the initiatives already taken by the new harness racing board. They provide renewed hope and vigour for the industry generally, which has been divided over recent years. Now there is a chance for them to come together and unite behind the new board for the benefit of harness racing.

I am pleased to have been able to comment on this important industry to country Victoria. The National Party will not oppose the legislation.

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — Victorians are in the habit of describing the state's racing industry, and in particular the thoroughbred racing industry, as glamorous. That is true, but the description at times obscures the small but significant associated risks.

Sadly, last Sunday at Benalla a promising young apprentice jockey, Andrew Gilbert, was killed in a race fall. It is appropriate that in this debate honourable members acknowledge those risks and that as a group we extend our sympathy to the Gilbert family, who were present at Benalla on that sad occasion.

The series of reforms in the bill are welcome because they are driven by the industry. I acknowledge the work of the Office of Racing in the Department of State and Regional Development led by Mark Close. For some time it has consulted with the industry in drafting the reforms in the bill.

I wish to speak about three particular aspects of the bill. Clause 3 amends the definition of 'picnic race meetings'. Picnic race meetings will not disappear from the Victorian racing scene. They have played a substantial role that will continue. The amendment is necessary to for the first time allow race clubs to offer

prize money at picnic race meetings. Until now trophies have been awarded at picnic race meetings but no prize money.

I have some experience of picnic race meetings, not as a trainer of thoroughbreds as the honourable member for Polwarth said, but as an owner. My experience as an owner may have improved had the honourable member for Polwarth been the trainer.

Mr Mulder — Don't bank on it!

Mr ROBINSON — I will put the experience of owning horses at that stage of my life down to the impetuosity of youth. Not long after leaving school, together with a group of friends, I bought into a horse called West Albury. The trainer assured us West Albury was gifted and that we would see evidence of its talents at Balnarring where it stepped out over 1200 metres. The result was slightly less than we expected, although better judges than I assured me that the horse ran a slashing 10th, that it was most impressive and good things were around the corner.

A fortnight later we stepped out at Healesville, where the horse finished ninth over a mile. We were improving, but it was slow progress. The group of us, as the owners, then took the generous advice of the trainer, who suggested that all it needed was slightly more distance.

The horse's final run for us was at Pakenham in a 2900-metre hurdle race. I can still vividly recall the description of the race by Brian Martin, who was the then race caller for 3UZ. He referred to our horse only three times in the 2900-metre race — his last reference to it was as 'a distant conveyance'. The horse concluded its racing career at Pakenham and we moved on to other things.

The picnic races are a significant element of the racing scene, and they add much colour and life to the state, particularly in country areas.

More significantly, the second aspect of the bill to which I want to draw attention is the streamlining of some appeal procedures. The bill effectively amends the jurisdiction of the Racing Appeals Tribunal in three ways. Firstly, it clarifies that the tribunal can hear appeals only in relation to penalty decisions rather than adjudicating on appeals regarding business decisions of controlling bodies. Secondly, it provides that persons appealing against drug-related penalties imposed by the stewards may appeal to the tribunal directly, and thirdly, it provides that stewards may appeal to the tribunal against an appeal hearing decision of a controlling body.

All of these steps are supported by the racing industry in the hope that they will produce an even more streamlined appeals procedure, which is vitally important for the wellbeing of racing administration in this state.

The third part of the bill that deserves comment is that which will place restrictions on betting agencies in Vanuatu operating in Victoria. The problem with overseas betting services has reached the stage where they pose a major threat to state finances, with vast sums now being bet offshore. Some time ago the New South Wales government passed legislation that makes it an offence — point blank — to place bets with Vanuatu-based betting services. However, the Victorian government has decided not to pursue that model because it is practically unenforceable. It is very difficult, without access to telecommunications records, to enforce that law. With this bill the Victorian government has taken the different approach of prohibiting agencies acting on behalf of overseas betting services from operating and promoting their services in Victoria. It trusts that that will have the desired effect.

The rise of betting services in Vanuatu poses a real problem for another reason — that is, the lack of authority the stewards in this state have to investigate betting transactions that are taking place offshore. If we are interested in ensuring the good health and probity of the racing industry in this state we need to ensure that such activities are contained. I will conclude my remarks on that point by indicating my full support for the bill and wishing it a speedy passage.

Mr BAILLIEU (Hawthorn) — I join the debate in the knowledge that although the bill is not of major significance to the legislative program, racing is an important industry which Victoria has had much to do with for a very long time, and I am sure that will be the case for some time into the future.

The opposition does not oppose the bill, many aspects of which it believes are perfectly reasonable. They include increasing the size of Harness Racing Victoria. At this point I should note the contribution of the late Ron Casey in that jurisdiction. His passing is a sad thing. Those of us who grew up following sports in Victoria will know what a contribution Ron Casey made to sport in general in Victoria and in Australia.

Other provisions of the bill the opposition thinks are reasonable include: allowing certain appeals to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal — although it notes the government's new-found respect for the VCAT, which it never had while it was in

opposition; amending the jurisdiction of the Racing Appeals Tribunal; transferring the registering of greyhounds from the National Coursing Association of Australia to Greyhound Racing Victoria — which is basically just shifting that responsibility across the room; increasing penalties at the disposal of the Bookmakers and Bookmakers' Clerks Registration Committee; providing immunity for that committee's members; and changing the names of the Harness Racing Board and the Greyhound Racing Control Board to Harness Racing Victoria and Greyhound Racing Victoria, which makes very good sense. Having come from a Tourism Victoria background I know that branding and branding consistently are important issues. The varying of the approval process for changes to racing club rules also seems a reasonable proposition.

The racing industry is an important industry. I cannot help but note that in 16 minutes time the Kilmore Cup will be run. There are a range of tips that might be — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BAILLIEU — No, if I had a phone account I am sure someone would accuse me of having a conflict of interest. I have no phone account, and I will not be making a bet. But I note, particularly given the minister's contribution here, that Quick Deception, number 14, is 17 to 1 in the Kilmore Cup.

I had the pleasure of visiting the Kilmore racetrack with the shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation, the honourable Ian Cover from another place, and what a terrific facility it is.

I acknowledge that I come from a family with a long history in racing, going back more prominently to the days of Ajax. My family spoke very fondly of the racing industry, and I have many friends actively involved in it. I cannot join the debate without mentioning the great Peter Lawrence and the service he gave the Victoria Amateur Turf Club, the Victoria Racing Club and other aspects of racing.

Other elements raised in the bill need to be noted. Primarily the bill is a symbol of the hypocrisy of the government as it has shifted from opposition to government. One cannot ignore the fact that racing is gambling, and when it comes to gambling there is no more hypocritical group than the government. When in opposition government members were the greatest opponents of gambling. For a three to four year period in opposition current government members decided that gambling was evil and that everything about gambling

and everyone involved was to be pilloried. I congratulate those involved on getting their message across because certainly many Victorians have taken that view as a consequence of the activities of none other than the minister who presented the bill. In government Labor has resumed its historical role, and Labor Party members acknowledge that they are out and out patrons of gambling. That point must be acknowledged.

It must also be acknowledged that the bill, in the sense that it promotes the racing and gambling industries, is a complete about-face for the minister and the government when compared to their role in opposition. There was no-one more opposed to the punt or the gamble — other than in his own personal sense — in a public sense than the current minister. He promised many things in opposition but since coming to government almost nothing has been said by him about gambling.

When the Labor Party went to the election its policy on gambling was fundamentally and principally to reduce the dependence of government on gambling revenue; that was its fundamental proposition. I turn to the third paragraph of the second-reading speech. If the term 'gambling' is substituted in that speech for the word 'racing' — because effectively the racing industry is a gambling industry — the minister would then be saying that the value of the gambling industry to this state is immense in terms of economic impact, employment and community benefits, particularly in rural and regional Victoria.

To paraphrase further, the second-reading speech would then state that over 30 000 people are employed by the gambling industry in this state and the economic impact of the gambling industry alone is more than \$230 million. The industry generates around \$140 million per annum in gambling tax revenue.

Therefore, the second-reading speech and the bill contain a fundamental proposition from the minister that the racing industry is a healthy industry, and I do not disagree. However, it is a turnaround from where this minister was when he was in opposition. Now he actively promotes the industry and not a word has been heard from him on gaming. We have seen him in just about every photo opportunity possible. At every opportunity the minister appears in a promotion for the racing industry, for which we can substitute the gambling industry.

It is interesting to note the impact of the government according to its own terms on the gambling industry. I

turn to budget paper 2 at page 133 where the Treasurer states:

Overall, gambling tax revenue in 2000–01 is expected to fall 19 per cent to \$1235 million.

That was the budget claim that was trumpeted. There had been a fall in gambling tax revenue. Then, in December the Treasurer revised his estimate to \$1.29 billion, but the reality is quite different because the government is a patron of gambling and has resumed its historical role. All along the government has concealed the fact that the goods and services tax has taken the place of some of that taxation revenue.

Mr Robinson interjected.

Mr BAILLIEU — Taxation revenue is mentioned in the bill. The Liberal Party analysis revealed with regard to the government's figures, which have been printed but not revealed — the GST component has not been revealed in subsequent documents — that by June this year gambling tax revenue in Victoria will be 20 per cent higher than when the Labor government came to office. Page 6 of the document just released by the Treasurer and the finance minister refers to gambling tax. Again there is a reference to the fact that current revenues are ahead of the pro rata position that was anticipated. The document reveals that the budget claim of a reduction in gambling revenue was a sham. The claim was made in the budget that there had been a revenue fall.

It is confessed at page 6 of the document entitled 'Quarterly financial update' that one cannot make that comparison unless one deals with the GST. The government has finally come clean — it is a confession. The budget claim was a sham all along. The reality is that over its four year term the government will collect more gambling revenue.

Mr Robinson — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I am reluctant to take a point of order but the practice of the house has been that opening speakers for the opposition are entitled to speak far and wide about legislation. The honourable member has chosen not to be the opening speaker but seems to be straying from the bill more than any other speaker. His comments about budgets and gambling in general have nothing to do with this bill, which contains a series of specific amendments to the administration of racing.

Mr BAILLIEU — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the second-reading speech deals with gambling tax issues.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Lupton) — Order! It is an interesting debate. Former speakers, including the honourable member for Mitcham, spoke on wide-ranging subjects that had little or no relevance to the bill. I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr BAILLIEU — Over the four-year term of the Bracks government — we presume it will be a four-year term because part of its agreement with the Independents was to go four full years — the government will take \$900 million more than the Kennett government projections for the same four-year period.

As I said, the opposition does not have any problems with most of the legislation although the bill reveals hypocrisy. Nothing is more pertinent than the raising of the Vanuatu or offshore betting operators. The government's aim may have been to stop offshore betting operations, because when in opposition it was keen to prevent problem gambling. There may have been some rationale in that, but what is the rationale in the second-reading speech for dealing with offshore betting operators? It is purely a tax-based rationale: it is designed to get the money, not to limit betting. I quote from the second-reading speech:

Victoria is being used as an administrative base by some offshore operators who primarily target the Australian betting market yet provide no financial returns to Australian —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Lupton) — Order! The honourable member cannot quote from a second-reading speech made in the same session of Parliament. The honourable member may paraphrase it.

Mr BAILLIEU — Paraphrasing, the minister refers to the leakage of betting to tax-advantaged offshore locations and that that is draining the pool of betting money. That exercise is based on the rationale of increasing the tax for government. As the honourable member for Polwarth mentioned, the legislation is not designed to stop offshore operators but a tax advantage the government seeks to promote. The government has taken a range of measures that will increase gambling tax revenue from all Victorians.

I reiterate that the opposition does not have particular problems with many aspects of the bill and supports the racing industry. However, it will not allow the hypocrisy of the government to be ignored or to remain unchecked.

Mr HELPER (Ripon) — I am pleased to support the Racing and Betting Acts (Amendment) Bill, which aims to improve the governance of the racing industry and develop a framework under which the industry can

move forward and develop. It is an extremely important industry for Victoria, particularly regional Victoria. Across the state it employs some 30 000 people; in electorates such as mine it would employ many thousands of people.

I do not claim to have the personal knowledge, experience and love for the racing industry as professed by the honourable members for Polwarth and Mitcham and other speakers. However, since my election to this place the industry has grown on me. I have had the pleasure of attending many racing meetings held by clubs made up of extremely dedicated people; they are normal and ordinary members of the community who gather to bring enjoyment to their communities, while fulfilling their passion and their love — that is, to be involved with the horse racing fraternity.

As I said, the bill introduces a framework for future directions in the increasingly competitive environment in which the racing industry finds itself. It is competitive with other calls on our entertainment and our wagering of dollars. The industry obviously has to keep a great pace — pardon the pun — ahead of the changing environment in which it finds itself.

In the transition of the Harness Racing Board to Harness Racing Victoria the board will be expanded from five to seven members, thereby allowing extra expertise to be brought onto the board that I am sure will aid greatly in taking the industry forward, particularly in regional areas. The bill also broadens the rights of appeal by participants in the industry, such as jockeys and trainers, against industry-controlling bodies, and it broadens the rights of appeal ultimately to reach the level of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

In the betting and wagering arena the bill brings the Lotteries Gaming and Betting Act into the 21st century. It recognises that international boundaries are breached by offshore operators who use Victoria as an administrative base but repatriate revenue offshore. The bill moves to prevent that from occurring.

By removing the restriction on mixed sports gatherings being held within a 25-kilometre radius of the general post office in the central business district the bill will encourage the racing industry to allow other codes, such as Arabian and quarter horse racing, to conduct meetings in the metropolitan area. That will strengthen the other codes and broaden the appeal of the racing industry to many Victorians. Although strictly speaking the benefit will apply to metropolitan areas, broadening the appeal of those alternate codes will strengthen the racing fraternity in country and regional areas.

The government is committed to the Victorian racing industry, particularly in regional areas. I share that commitment particularly because I recognise the importance of the industry and the enjoyment it brings to people in my electorate. I have grown to appreciate that fact now far more than when I first entered Parliament, and I look forward to increasing my own enjoyment and understanding of the industry.

I commend the minister for pursuing the process of consultation in the development of the bill and for generating broader support for it, not only among the political parties represented in the house but across the industry and in regional Victoria. To allow other honourable members who have a greater wealth of experience in the racing industry to speak, I will cut my comments short.

Mr ROWE (Cranbourne) — I thank the honourable member for Ripon for his courtesy in cutting his contribution short to allow me to comment on the bill.

As honourable members would know, the horseracing industry is the largest employer in the Cranbourne electorate. The biggest racehorse training complex in the southern hemisphere is located in the Cranbourne township. It is currently training in excess of 1000 horses. In addition, the Cranbourne racetrack is in the unique position of having a night trotting and greyhound racing facility.

The bill touches on all aspects of the racing industry in Cranbourne. I have had the pleasure of attending committee lunches with the Minister for Racing, who — —

Mr Hulls — You won!

Mr ROWE — I got the trifecta that day. It was very good; we celebrated for the rest of the day. It does not happen very often because the bookies always seem to get the better of me.

The Liberal Party supports all three codes of the racing industry, which is attested to by the support a number of its members give to the bookmaking fraternity.

Mr Robinson — It's one-way traffic!

Mr ROWE — As the honourable member for Mitcham says, there is a lot of one-way traffic. The bill seeks to make a number of changes, and the opposition is generally supportive of them. It particularly supports any legislation to provide better organisation of the racing industries.

In relation to the one-stop betting shop, rather than writing a letter to the racing minister and offering him \$250 000 annually — —

Mr Hulls — Not personally!

Mr ROWE — Not personally but for Victoria's coffers. It may have been better for the minister to get Graham Richardson to come down and do it at a meeting with the Premier of Victoria at which the Minister for Racing was not mentioned. It seems to be that at meetings where the minister is not actually mentioned, money changes hands — for the benefit of the Labor Party, anyway! One wonders whether it would have been better to have taken the revenue and kept the people employed and regulated.

The issue is similar to online casinos in the gaming industry. The decision taken by the federal government on that issue was perhaps the wrong one. Certainly the former state Liberal government's policy was to allow it, but to regulate it. Unless such operations are regulated gamblers can be at risk of losing their money and not getting it back. I lean towards the regulation of the area. Betting tax would go into consolidated revenue and be used to benefit Victoria's racing industry.

To facilitate the passage of the bill it has been agreed that honourable members will not speak for long periods. I wish the bill a speedy passage through the house.

Mr SMITH (Glen Waverley) — I add my support to any measures to curb the avoidance of taxes by gambling operators working offshore from places such as Vanuatu. I visited the casino there and saw how the system worked. It is a detrimental step when people are assisting in any endeavour in life and someone else gets the benefit of it for nothing.

I had a relative who for many years was just about the largest starting price bookie in Australia. Sadly that form of illegal activity affects the lives of anyone involved in it in a most degrading manner. If the bill is able to close the loopholes that currently exist, I believe that government is on the right road.

Governments are required to seek their revenue from all sorts of sources, and gambling is one of them. Provided it is above board and will stop people from doing things illegally, the bill certainly has my support.

Mr HULLS (Minister for Racing) — I thank all members who contributed to the debate. I will start with the honourable member for Glen Waverley, who spoke about his experience in Vanuatu. It may be that he has

read the article on the front page of the *Australian Financial Review* of 26 February which refers to Vanuatu and mentions some of the people who operate there. I am not saying that Mr Tripp, to whom I will refer shortly, is that type of person. The article states:

Roving Indian businessman Nath Ghosh has finally arrived at a haven where his colourful corporate style and his mysterious 82.5 kilogram ruby are made welcome — income-tax-free Vanuatu.

His story — the sensation of Vanuatu's pretty capital, Port Vila, with its floral-shirted financiers — is extraordinary even by the lurid tropical standards of the Pacific Islands.

Cream-suited, with chunky rings on each finger, Ghosh, described as resembling Orson Welles, has done deals and run companies from Bengal to Bangkok, Singapore to Italy.

But it is in Port Vila that Ghosh has chosen to deposit what he claims may be the world's biggest ruby — allegedly valued by a potential buyer from Hong Kong at \$317 million.

The ruby was escorted by an armed guard and whisked past customs on its arrival.

...

Ghosh says he will use the money

which will be raised by way of bearer bonds and will be 140 per cent of the annual gross domestic product of Vanuatu —

for the biggest infrastructure projects that Vanuatu has seen ...

So such people certainly do exist in Vanuatu!

I refer to the honourable member for Polwarth, who spoke about Mr Tripp and Mr Tripp's offer to pay \$250 000 per annum to the Victorian government. Mr Tripp claims that he already contributes to the Victorian racing industry through various sponsorships and that his administrative operation in Yarrowonga provides significant local employment. In my letter to Mr Tripp about that proposal I stated:

The regulatory regime for bookmaking in Victoria has a number of objectives including:

generally promoting the viability of the bookmaking profession in Victoria

protecting Victorian punters by ensuring that there are financial guarantees to cater for a bookmaker who defaults in the payment of a winning bet

imposing strict licensing requirements to ensure the probity and integrity of Victorian bookmakers

providing for direct supervision by the racing codes as part of their general stewardship of race meetings and associated betting activities

requiring Victorian bookmakers to provide a financial benefit to the racing industry

assisting in the collection of federal government tax payments.

I advised Mr Tripp that the Victorian government had a policy commitment to promoting the viability of the bookmaking profession in Victoria and to that end was implementing a range of reforms to provide the profession with a competitive operating environment.

Obviously, I advised him also that I had considered his request for licensing or exemption in Victoria and that it was open for him to make an application for licensing under Victorian legislation, which would necessitate his locating his business at a Victorian racecourse. If Mr Tripp wants to do that, it is entirely a matter for him, and his application will be dealt with appropriately.

However, I told him in no uncertain terms that the current legislation would not accommodate any licensing arrangement that would allow him to continue operating from Vanuatu. I told him I was not convinced that it would be possible to introduce new legislation that would provide for such an offshore licence while still meeting the listed objectives to which I have already referred, and I stand by that. It is important that Victoria have a squeaky clean industry that is subject to appropriate probity requirements.

If Mr Tripp wants to set up business in this state, that is fine; that is a matter for Mr Tripp and he will have to go through the hoops and roundabouts that are required for probity checks. But the government is not prepared simply to accept \$250 000 a year on the basis that he can be subjected to no probity requirements at all. We have to protect the bookmakers here in Victoria. It is absolutely crucial that we do that. We want to expand the number of bookmakers in Victoria, but we are not prepared to enter into some sort of under-the-counter deal with Mr Tripp, or anyone else for that matter, simply so that person can avoid the appropriate checks and balances that exist in Victoria.

I refer to the contribution of the honourable member for Rodney, who seems to have been reading from notes that he was handed last year rather than this year because he was not aware that there is now a new chairperson of Harness Racing Victoria, none other than Mr Neil Busse. Not only is Mr Busse an excellent appointment, if I say so myself, but he is leading Harness Racing Victoria into the 21st century by having earlier this week released a draft five-year strategic plan. It will be a very exciting period for harness racing under Neil Busse's stewardship.

The honourable member also asked if I would consider country representation on the Harness Racing Board. The answer to that is that Mr Peter Bourke has just been appointed to fill a vacancy on the Harness Racing Board and he is the former vice-president of the Echuca Harness Racing Club, so he fully understands what is happening with harness racing in regional Victoria. Neil Busse is a former Benalla boy.

The proposed legislation will allow two new members to be appointed to Harness Racing Victoria, and I will of course be looking again at people from country Victoria. However, I am also very keen to get more women involved in the governance structure of harness racing. In fact I appointed Prue Lovell, the first ever woman to be appointed to the Harness Racing Board, and she is doing a very good job. I certainly hope at least one of the two new vacancies to come up will be filled by a woman.

Some of us had the pleasure of going to the A. G. Hunter Cup on Saturday night and seeing the sensational crowd there — some 20 000 people. A large percentage of those people were women, and of them a large percentage were young women.

It may well be they were there not just to watch the harness races and meet with the minister, but to see Vanessa Amorosi, who was performing in concert. It was yet another great innovation by Harness Racing Victoria to combine harness racing with such a concert. The organisation realises that it is selling an entertainment product and has to compete with other such products in Victoria.

Mr Baillieu — A world of entertainment!

Mr HULLS — Indeed, as the honourable member for Hawthorn said, it is a world of entertainment in the harness, thoroughbred and greyhound racing industries. Organisations that administer those industries are coming to realise that they are competing for the discretionary dollar and selling an entertainment product.

And what a night it was on Saturday night — and can Vanessa Amorosi sing! She is a sensation, as everybody would agree. She brought the crowd there, and pleasing as the concert was the crowd did not leave after it. People in the crowd saw the freak Lyell Creek win the Trotters Final, watched Vanessa Amorosi's performance, and stayed on for the running of the A. G. Hunter Cup. That is the future of harness racing in this state.

The honourable member for Hawthorn is the shadow Minister for Gaming. I notice he did not lead off. He

spoke on the bill for a couple of minutes and then spoke about a whole range of other matters. He ran off the track a bit and his contribution was somewhat blinkered. Some would say that after that contribution he needs to be swabbed. He seemed to suggest that in opposition we were vehemently opposed to gaming and yet here we are now, introducing legislation that might improve the viability of the racing industry. The Labor Party was never opposed to gaming. The honourable member for Hawthorn knows that. He has said plenty of times that Labor in government introduced gaming to Victoria — it introduced legislation that allowed a casino to be set up in the state. It is nonsense to say that Labor is opposed to gaming.

The Labor Party was opposed to a lack of transparency in the industry and any suggestion that dirty little deals were being done between people involved in the gaming industry and the former Kennett government. That is why it continued to argue for the release of the casino documents and called for an inquiry into the casino tendering process when the former government did not release them. When the government came to office it released the relevant documents.

This bill is about probity. It is important to have appropriate checks and balances in the industry. The Bracks government is not prepared to accept an offer from the operators of the Number One Betting Shop in Vanuatu that it pay \$250 000 a year because the government would not have control over probity in this state. The government is keen to ensure that the appropriate probity, checks and balances exist in Victoria, and that would not be possible if the government were to allow operators in Vanuatu to use Victoria as a base for their operations.

Will this legislation stop people betting in Vanuatu? That remains to be seen. Probably it will not stop everybody, and I am sure that there is no shock horror about that. Legislation was introduced in New South Wales that prohibited anyone in that state betting outside of it in Vanuatu. Has it stopped people doing that? Not totally, but there has been a huge diminution in the number of bets made in Vanuatu from New South Wales. Although the legislation is hard to police, people are basically honest, and if they know it is illegal to bet into Vanuatu they will be reluctant to do so. The figures show that there has been a huge drop in the number of bets.

The Bracks government has tried to make its legislation more enforceable. It will not allow an operator such as the Number One Betting Shop to use Victoria as a base to attract business to Vanuatu. Apart from anything else, business that goes to Vanuatu is business that goes

to people who are competing against Victorian bookmakers, who have to go through the relevant probity requirements. Such operations also affect income that comes into the state through Tabcorp and other sources, and the government believes this is a way to stop that occurring.

I thank the honourable member for Mitcham for an excellent contribution to the debate. It again shows that when it comes to issues in relation to racing, betting and gaming, as a member and a parliamentary secretary he is on top of these issues. In my book, he is on a winner. I also thank the honourable member for Cranbourne for his contribution. He quite rightly said that I was at the Cranbourne races with him some time ago, and I recall — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr HULLS — I will take up that interjection. I recall that the honourable member for Cranbourne backed a trifecta on that particular day. I hope that his domestic partner reads *Hansard* and finds out that he won. As to how much he won and whether or not he shared it around, I stand by my commitment to him that what happened at Cranbourne on that day will stay there.

I thank all honourable members for their worthwhile contributions to this important debate.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

POLICE REGULATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr HAERMAYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services).

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — It gives me pleasure to debate the Police Regulation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. The opposition does not oppose the bill. It believes many provisions in the bill make good sense.

I thank the minister for the excellent briefing provided to opposition members of Parliament. There were no time limits or restrictions on attendees, and some of the

issues we raised at that briefing were followed up by the minister with a letter outlining and answering all our concerns. Although the minister is not in the chamber, I hope he will have that comment passed on to him.

The source of the bill is the Labor Party's community protection action plan entitled 'No more excuses on crime'. As I said in an earlier debate today, the plan should have been called 'Nothing but excuses on crime', because in recent months we have had nothing but excuses for crime in this state. The background to the bill can be found in Labor's plan under the heading 'Building public confidence in the Victoria Police', particularly in this statement:

Ensuring that all disciplinary charges against police are referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions who will decide whether criminal charges should be filed.

The opposition certainly has no problem with that. The plan refers to a number of other issues under the same heading, but the opposition has not seen any government action in several areas. It also refers to the establishment of a police career service commission, a matter the opposition will be examining closely when legislation is brought forward. The plan indicates that Labor will ensure the office of the Deputy Ombudsman (Police Complaints) has adequate powers, staff and resources to investigate complaints made against police. The opposition is still not confident that has been done.

The opposition is awaiting debate on the whistleblowers legislation. I understand the bill will be debated during this sessional period. The opposition believes the prohibition of discrimination or harassment on grounds of ethnicity, religion or sexual preference by and within the police force is occurring.

One of the main concerns the opposition has with the bill, although it is not opposing it, relates to other things that are happening in the police force. In his second-reading speech the minister indicated that he was keen to ensure that as many trained police members as possible were freed up to do operational work rather than being stuck behind a desk doing other non-police duties. He has bipartisan support on that.

I will not stray too far from the bill, but in regard to the number of prisoners in police cells I suggest we are heading backwards. You cannot say, 'We are going to free up police to be out on the beat and we are going to increase patrol hours' but then have officers leg-roped to police cells full of offenders. It is worth mentioning that on 25 January this year there were 248 offenders in police cells.

Mr Haermeyer — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the bill relates to changes to the Police Regulation Act which deals with police discipline and public servants being empowered to take responsibility for the management of property held in custody by police. It does not in any way touch on the issue of the police cells. Although I am happy to have a debate on that at another time, I suggest it is not germane to the bill.

Mr WELLS — Mr Acting Speaker, on the point of order, I was intending to go through this very quickly. I referred to the second-reading speech which indicates that the bill will free up as many operational police staff as possible and get them out patrolling the streets. That is part of what the minister said in the second-reading speech.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Loney) — Order! At this stage I do not uphold the point of order, given that in their opening remarks it is common for lead speakers to be given some latitude to make passing references to other matters. If the honourable member for Wantirna is simply making a passing reference before returning to the provisions in the bill, I have no problem with it.

Mr WELLS — I give that commitment, Mr Acting Speaker. I will whiz through a few points before addressing the bill.

The point is, as I clearly said, you cannot have the minister saying, 'We are going to free up operational police' and then have them as full-time prison officers looking after police cells across the state. As I said in an earlier speech, we have a situation where police cells that have a capacity of 120 now have up to 326. We are using a lot of police resources to look after those prisoners.

The opposition is also concerned about the fact that we now have an increase in women prisoners. Male and female police officers are being caught up doing the work of prison officers rather than being out there patrolling the streets.

There is a fear in the Labor Party that we are locking up too many people in police cells and using valuable police resources, but figures from the ABS clearly show that the rate per 100 000 adults in Victorian prisons is 86.1, whereas the Australian average is 142.9, so the minister need not worry that we are locking up too many people. Victoria has the second-lowest rate of incarceration in Australia, behind the ACT.

The other reason for the minister introducing the bill is that we need to get the confidence of the police

high. At the moment some serious issues remain. The opposition has grave concerns about police numbers. The Victoria Police annual report states that at 30 June 1999 there were 9360 police. One year later, under the stewardship of this minister, that number has actually decreased to 9358. So, during a time when the minister has been so keen to fudge figures and to get out there with his media appearances, the number of police officers in Victoria has actually decreased by 2. I am using the official figures here. We were promised 200 extra police in the first year of this government, but in actual fact we went back by 2.

Honourable members interjecting.

An Honourable Member — The academy is full!

Mr WELLS — The academy is full, and I don't have an issue with that, and I think the advertisements the minister is running currently are very good — they have done an excellent job in recruiting. However, what concerns me is the attrition rate. I am sure the minister would acknowledge that the attrition rate is serious. In fact, in the last calendar year it was 489, and that is a serious matter that will be addressed later.

The main purpose of the bill is to amend the Police Regulation Act in the areas of police disciplinary and personnel matters, property in possession of police, and fees or charges imposed for services provided by police.

Clause 5 requires the Chief Commissioner of Police to consult with the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) if he is to make criminal charges against a police force member. Members of the opposition understand the chief commissioner fully supports that measure and actually requested the amendment, so we do not have a problem with that.

We also understand the bill will ensure that a police member is not actually charged until the advice of the DPP has come back to the chief commissioner. That is straightforward commonsense.

A list of crimes will be inserted in schedule A, and any offence listed in the schedule that is committed by a police force member will have to be referred to the DPP. However, some other offences may also be referred by the chief commissioner to the DPP, and the chief commissioner has the flexibility to determine those matters.

Other consultation with the DPP will occur under the bill. The minister, for example, may have concerns about some criminal matters involving the police force. It is my understanding that he now has the power to

write to the DPP and ask for advice, but the bill requires the minister to contact the chief commissioner in writing to notify him of his intention.

The deputy ombudsman dealing with police complaints can also refer matters to the DPP. Previously the deputy ombudsman had to go to the chief commissioner and there would have been potential for a conflict of interest in this area. If the deputy ombudsman handling police complaints said a particular person should be charged and the chief commissioner said, 'No, I do not think he should be charged', you would have a no-win situation. Under the new provision the relevant ombudsman can go directly to the DPP so long as he notifies the chief commissioner in writing of his intention. That adds some transparency and provides better mechanisms for both the chief commissioner and the deputy ombudsman, and it also assists the minister in dealing with these matters.

Members of the opposition have some concerns about potential conflicts under the bill, and further down the track we will ask for a briefing on police discipline matters. At the moment this bill refers only to police criminal matters, and I believe the minister will be reviewing discipline matters later.

The opposition has some concerns about the effect of the amendments proposed in clause 6 on the operation of section 86 of the act. As the amended section implies, a dispute between the ombudsman and the chief commissioner regarding criminal matters could not happen. However, a conflict between the ombudsman and the chief commissioner regarding a disciplinary matter is possible — for example, for a disciplinary matter where the ombudsman is not happy about the action taken by the chief commissioner regarding an investigation the provision seems somewhat vague. The opposition will not raise this as a contentious point at this stage because it believes it will be addressed when disciplinary matters, which are under review, are dealt with further down the track.

The legislation provides for an increase of two or more members of the Police Appeals Board to provide flexibility. That board could be stacked with Labor Party appointments. The opposition wants an assurance from the minister that the board will not be stacked with the government's mates. What does 'two or more' members on the Police Appeals Board mean? Is it 3, 4 or 5? If we wait a little longer the honourable member for Melton will increase it to 10. The opposition wants an assurance from the minister that it will not be a payback for a number of Labor Party mates.

The opposition will be looking closely at the appointment of the new Chief Commissioner of Police and hopes it will be an open and transparent process.

Clause 8 imposes a time limit of 14 days for a police member to apply to the board for a disciplinary review matter, which makes good sense. Clause 9 changes the requirement concerning the members of the Police Appeals Board to hear an application for dismissal of a police member, with which the opposition has no problems.

Clause 10 refers to the hearing of appeals before the board being held in public unless otherwise ordered. Most people would say that all disciplinary appeal matters should be held in public. The opposition accepts that point, but, as happened in Maryborough, there could be a case involving sexual offences and those matters should not be heard in public. The minister is right in saying that there should be closed hearings in some cases to protect victims of offences. That makes good sense.

I turn to the disposal of unclaimed property. It is my understanding that currently a police inspector has to dispose of stolen property. If your house is broken into and you lose your television set, when the criminal is caught he could hand over your television set, but he might have another 10 or more television sets at home. Perhaps five are returned to the owners and the other five are then held at the police station for a certain period. At the end of that period the television sets would be disposed of. That could be handled by a public servant instead of being undertaken by an inspector.

Under this legislation public servants will carry out criminal checks. That makes sense because the policemen should be working on operational matters. The opposition supports that move. The public servants would be sworn to secrecy. I believe there are two secrecy acts under which a public servant is sworn in addition to discipline matters in the Public Sector Management and Employment Act. The public should not be concerned about a public servant handling that work.

If a policeman causes property damage of less than \$500 the matter will not be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions. After discussions with departmental officers, I agree that a \$500 limit makes sense. The other matter concerns theft. If a policeman steals anything, even if it is 4, 6 or 8 footballs from a police cell, the matter will be referred to the DPP. The opposition agrees with that because there should be transparency if there is to be confidence in the police

force. If a policeman steals from a police cell, there should be no second chances. The police commissioner has a right to refer that matter to the DPP.

During the briefing the opposition asked whether that will mean that the DPP will have many more matters referred to him. The minister responded by saying that currently there are approximately 50 referrals a year, and that will probably increase to 100 to 120. Much work has been done by police command, the minister's office, the Department of Justice and the DPP to ensure that the DPP's office will not be bogged down with petty referrals from the Chief Commissioner of Police. The opposition is pleased that only the serious matters that infringe on confidence in the police force will be referred.

The opposition is of the opinion that the current issue between Dr Perry and the chief commissioner regarding the Richmond Secondary College is an internal disciplinary matter and will not be affected by the legislation. The minister will review disciplinary matters at a later date and the bill before the house deals only with criminal matters. Dr Perry is asking the chief commissioner to review some of the police matters regarding the Richmond Secondary College and a number of matters arising out of the S11 protest. The opposition has no issue with that. If they were criminal matters Dr Perry was following up I would ask how the bill will affect them, although it has not yet been enacted.

As was reported in the *Age* of 10 February, Dr Perry was concerned about disciplinary matters. The civil action had finished, the demonstrators had won a \$300 000 payout and Dr Perry recommended that disciplinary charges proceed. Mr Comrie said that because of the approximately seven years that had elapsed between 1994 and the present the matter should not proceed. The matter has been referred for the consideration of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. In other words, while Dr Perry was saying that the police should be charged with breaches of police discipline, Mr Comrie was saying too much time had elapsed, that the police were happy with the way the matter had been dealt with and that the minister should deal with it. It is my understanding that the bill will not affect that process.

Opposition members do not oppose the bill; we have raised some matters of concern, but recognise that some of the provisions in the bill are already being applied in practice. The bill merely clarifies issues and makes the police force more open and transparent, particularly in regard to the minister, the Director of Public

Prosecutions, the deputy ombudsman and the Chief Commissioner of Police.

Mr KILGOUR (Shepparton) — The National Party does not oppose the Police Regulation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill and considers that the changes made by it will improve relationships. The bill is important because it ensures that the disciplinary arm of Victoria's police force is exemplary and no-one can throw muck at it. The changes proposed make for a better operation.

On my reading of the bill it did not appear to present too many problems. Nevertheless, I contacted the Police Association to get its view. I received a letter from Senior Sergeant Paul Mullett of the Police Association, in which he said the association had no issue with the bill except that the association had not been consulted about it, even though the bill amends and formalises relationships between the Office of Public Prosecutions and the Senior Assistant Ombudsman (Police Complaints). Nevertheless, Senior Sergeant Mullett said that, from the association's perspective, the bill contained machinery amendments to which it had no objection.

I believe the changes are necessary. It is a pity the Police Association was not consulted as it should have been, in the opinion of Senior Sergeant Mullett. Members of the minister's staff have said that consultation occurred with another member of the association.

I wondered what the chief commissioner thought about the bill and whether he thought the legislation was needed, so I wrote to him. I received a reply from someone in his office to say that I should write to him through the minister. That is open and accountable government for you! A member of Parliament cannot write to a chief commissioner, and a chief commissioner cannot tell a member of Parliament how he feels about a piece of legislation.

There is no big problem with the legislation, only with the way it has been handled. I am reminded of the time the honourable member for Wantirna and I went to see the chief commissioner, Mr Comrie — who has done a tremendous job for policing in this state — to talk about general police matters and, in particular, local priority policing, which has become a good institution, particularly in country Victoria. We were told we could not speak with Mr Comrie unless a member of the minister's staff was present. Once again, that is an example of the open and accountable government we hear so much about! The minister does not allow a member of Parliament to get the information he or she

needs, because the chief commissioner will, quite naturally, not want to say the same things in front of a member of the minister's staff as he might say to the honourable member for Wantirna and me on a couple of issues. That is not good enough.

The other day I had lunch in Horsham with the previous Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and I asked him for his advice on the practice. He said he had never given a directive such as appears to have been given by the present minister. In his day no honourable member would have needed a member of the minister's staff present when he or she was talking with the chief commissioner. The Bracks government does not trust its top departmental people to say the right thing to members of Parliament.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr KILGOUR — I am sure the Minister for Agriculture would not make such a stipulation about opposition members wishing to speak to a head of his department. I will wait and see — but I think the Minister for Agriculture is a more trusting person.

The honourable member for Wantirna and I had an enjoyable hour with Mr Comrie, and it is unfortunate that we were not able to discuss all the things we may have wanted to.

The same thing happened when we visited Port Phillip Prison. A member of the minister's staff had to be present in case the people running the prison wanted to speak to shadow ministers of the Liberal and National parties about things that may have concerned them. We were not able to get the right information because there was a risk that a member of the minister's staff would rat on them. So much for open and accountable government!

The bill will provide a better operational structure. The tribunal, which will be able to hear matters of police discipline when required, needs to have added flexibility. I commend the minister for providing that extra flexibility by allowing additional people to serve on the tribunal.

In many cases police are stood down when required to face a disciplinary tribunal, and if that occurs they are not replaced and the station is down on its required numbers. Police stations are always under pressure because officers may be on leave or attending court. I note that one of the members of the Police Appeals Board must be a legal practitioner of at least five years standing. I support that provision.

The bill provides for a 10-day time limit for the lodgment of a promotion appeal to the Police Appeals Board. That will reduce the amount of time wasted by police officers in attending to the functions of the board. The bill will allow the board to accept the late lodgment of an appeal or application for review. That will benefit some officers who may be on holidays or even overseas.

Clause 10 provides that Police Appeals Board hearings may be closed to the public and permits the board to order the suppression of evidence. That is a necessary provision because, as the honourable member for Wantirna said, there have been occasions and will be others in the future where it is in the best interests of members of the force and the public for that to occur.

The bill will narrow the range of offences that require the Chief Commissioner of Police to consult with the Director of Public Prosecutions. The use of public servants in the management of non-core policing roles is increased. The former coalition government was criticised for allowing public servants to take over some of the non-core duties of police officers, but the process has now been happening for some years and no problems have arisen. It has resulted in far more police undertaking the core duties of policing rather than dealing with non-core duties such as the seizure of goods, taking possession of unclaimed goods and chattels and so on.

I commend the Minister for Police and Emergency Services for ensuring that police will be released for core policing duties rather than dealing with mundane duties that can often be dealt with by members of the public service. At present police officers are required to undertake an increasing number of criminal checks of teachers, kindergarten teachers and other people dealing with young children. Those duties can be undertaken by public servants. The police command has no objections to the bill and the Victoria Police Association does not have a problem with it. I have spoken with a number of superintendents who do not have any problems with the bill. With those few words I indicate the National Party's support for the bill.

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — I support the Police Regulation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. The contributions of the honourable members for Wantirna and Shepparton require a brief response. On the one hand the honourable member for Wantirna warmly congratulated the Minister for Police and Emergency Services on the briefings provided to him by officers of the minister's department. On the other hand, the honourable member for Shepparton criticised the minister because he said it was inappropriate to have a

member of the minister's staff present when opposition members met with the chief commissioner. Perhaps it is fortunate that I was not a member of Parliament during those dark years when the Liberal and National parties were in government.

However, I understand from my colleagues that it was a regular practice during that period for ministerial advisers to be present when the then Labor opposition received briefings from departmental heads. I am assured by my colleagues there were numerous examples, particularly with the education portfolio, where members of Parliament were denied access to schools. Opposition members are hypocritical. The honourable member for Shepparton is making a cheap political point about the so-called lack of access and transparency. He should look at the record of the previous government, on which people made a choice at the last election.

I refer briefly to police numbers. A key plank of the Labor Party during the last election campaign was to have an extra 800 police officers. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services is delivering on that key election plank. The honourable member for Wantirna should visit the police academy and see the parade ground full of new recruits. The honourable member acknowledged the excellent advertising campaign undertaken by the government to recruit high-calibre recruits to further boost police numbers. Indeed, the government and the minister will deliver on the election promise of an additional 800 police because it was voted in on it.

The honourable member for Wantirna shakes his head. The opposition will continue to play catch-up with the government because the government will deliver on its key policy commitments, especially the extra 800 police, to ensure that Victoria is a safer place.

The bill amends the provisions of the Police Regulation Act regarding disciplinary provisions, the Police Appeals Board and related matters. They are essentially machinery provisions that will tighten up and improve the regulations to suit current procedures.

I will touch briefly on a number of important clauses. Clause 4 imposes a time limit of 10 days from the date of notification for a police member to lodge an appeal against promotion or other transfer decision. That addresses the question of the validity of the time limit currently included in the 1992 police regulations by elevating that provision and placing it in the act. An obvious anomaly is being cleaned up.

Clause 5 is important. It requires the Chief Commissioner of Police to consult the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) on any possible criminal offences — a vast number of offences — listed in the proposed first schedule, which is inserted by clause 17. The schedule contains a comprehensive list of more serious offences — those the public expects the DPP to investigate. The minor offences indicated by the honourable member for Wantirna will be dealt with separately, but the public believes that is the appropriate course of action in respect of the serious offences detailed in clause 17.

Further, the commissioner can consult the DPP on other possible offences not listed in that proposed first schedule. The bill honours an election commitment by the government to consult the DPP before laying disciplinary charges where the investigation has revealed a possible commission of a criminal offence.

Clause 6 amends the principal act to enable the deputy ombudsman or the minister to refer to the DPP the question of taking criminal proceedings against a police member. It empowers the deputy ombudsman to act directly in cases where it is considered that a police decision not to consult the DPP was inappropriate. With those further safeguards in place the community can now have greater confidence in the process. The range of options open to the deputy ombudsman has been increased adding to the thoroughness of the investigatory process.

Clause 7 will improve the efficiency of the Police Appeals Board — a functional matter — by appointing two or more deputy chairpersons and at least one member who is a legal practitioner of at least five years experience. That matter was adequately canvassed in earlier contributions.

Clause 10 is an important amendment that will permit the appeals board to close hearings to the public and order the suppression of evidence where that is in the public interest. As was indicated in the contributions of the honourable members for Wantirna and Shepparton, the Maryborough situation is an example of a difficult case of alleged sexual misconduct of certain police members in Maryborough where matters should have been heard in a closed hearing. Obviously where there are matters of such sensitivity, particularly relating to a small country town and alleged sexual offences against women, it is appropriate that opportunities be made available to close the board. The publication of evidence may need to be suppressed. It is a reasonable clause and I am pleased to see that the opposition supports it. Under the current act, the deputy ombudsman can only make a recommendation to the

chief commissioner that he refer a matter to the DPP for advice. The bill empowers the deputy ombudsman to refer directly to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The bill will play an important role with the public's perception of and confidence in the legal system by further improving the checks, balances and safeguards in police disciplinary procedures. In that respect, it forms one of the key planks of the government's platform of open, accountable and transparent government. I applaud the minister for his initiative in bringing the matter forward and wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — I am pleased to speak on the bill. However, I must first comment on some of the statements made by the honourable member for Richmond. The honourable member for Wantirna originally commented on the fact that the number of sworn officers had been reduced by two. The honourable member for Richmond took umbrage and spoke at great length about how the academy was full and has been full for some time.

Mention was made of police numbers being a key political platform at the 1999 election. As a mere individual I assumed, apparently incorrectly, that the intention was to boost police force numbers by 800 over the four-year period. However, although the academy has been full since August 1999 — under the previous government, which filled the academy and was working through the process — the number of sworn officers has reduced over the intervening period. If the academy is full and cadets are being put through, why is the number of sworn officers being reduced? There must be some other problem apart from the recruiting campaign, because the rate of attrition is greater than the rate of recruitment.

As the honourable member for Shepparton said, the current government was critical of the use of public servants by the former government but has now embraced that procedure. Public servants are now being used, and I agree wholeheartedly with that. It is essential. Why pour \$30 000 or \$40 000 into training a police officer to handle lost property? I support the use of public servants.

I return to the question of why the number of police leaving the force is greater than the number going through the academy, when the academy is flat out. Let us look at the recent S11 situation, where members of Victoria Police performed in an exemplary manner.

The officers went in under adverse conditions at the behest of no less than the Premier of the state, who

asked the Victoria Police to ensure that the delegates at the conference had access to the conference facilities. As a result, members of the police force have been charged. Many of the members of S11 who demonstrated — for want of a better word — have been charged and gone through the courts. None of them have been convicted or even been found guilty, and yet the police have had a roasting, with a number of police officers being charged.

Honourable members may have seen the television footage showing a couple of police officers swinging their batons over the top of a fence and hitting demonstrators on the other side. However, the footage did not show that at the bottom of the heap of demonstrators was a police sergeant who had gone in to rescue a father and his son, because the father had been stupid enough to take his young son into the middle of the riot. The press footage of that incident misleadingly depicted the police acting in a brutal manner.

The Premier later reprehensibly refused to support the action of Victoria Police. The police officers did a job that nobody wanted to do, but at the behest of the Premier they went in and put life and limb on the line to look after conference delegates. Honourable members may recall that police were injured, had urine thrown over them and had fishhooks thrown at them. They suffered quite inhumane treatment, yet Victoria's court system has not seen fit to penalise the perpetrators who have been charged and gone through the court process.

Members of Parliament and the people of Victoria have the right to expect that when members of the police force go out to do a job — a job that all honourable members believe is necessary — they will receive the respect and protection of the courts. Parliament should consider the possibility that that lack of respect and protection is one of the reasons why the number of officers leaving the police force is greater than the number of recruits entering it. Members of the police force are under a great deal of stress.

The recruitment of police trainees is an important issue. The former government spent thousands of dollars on the purchase of computers under a good policy to relieve the strain of paperwork on sworn officers of Victoria Police. The current government and minister are to be congratulated for using public servants to take over that role so that highly skilled officers can get out on the beat. I make those comments because I believe the comments of the honourable member for Richmond put a bad slant on some of the issues relating to the police force. The problems in the police force will not be addressed by putting 800 new police officers through the academy. The question that must be

answered is why more police officers are leaving from the other end of the career path.

I do not see any great problems with the bill. However, I express my concern that when the Police Association was asked to comment on it, it stated quite clearly it had no issue to raise concerning the bill other than the fact that it was not consulted by the government in relation to it. Given that the Johnson report placed great emphasis on the Police Association being involved in a number of dealings with the Victoria Police and its operations, I would have expected the association to have been involved in any consultation on planning to streamline or improve the police regulations.

I will refer briefly to the policy implemented by the Labor government when it established the Police Appeals Board in April last year. Although the board has been in operation for less than 12 months it is obvious that concerns have been raised by the minister, or perhaps by the police hierarchy, that a situation may arise where insufficient members would be available to sit on that board because of conflicts of interest, illness, and so on. The bill addresses that issue and will make the Police Appeals Board more efficient.

The bill has a number of good points. However, as a member of Parliament and someone who has considerable respect for Victoria Police I emphasise my concern about the increasing number of sworn police officers who are leaving the force. There is no point ramming new recruits through the police academy if members are continuing to leave the force at a greater rate. Something has to be done. I urge the minister to investigate why members of the police force are leaving at such a rate.

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — It is good to see the bill on police regulation being debated because it is in line with the government's policy to improve community safety by providing more police and ensuring that Victoria has a highly competent and fully professional police force that functions in full accord with sound principles of good governance.

To achieve the first of those aims — that is, the provision of more police — it is the government's policy to provide 800 extra police. That is in stark contrast with the record of the previous government, which was one of loss of personnel and lack of new recruits. As the house has already heard, the academy is full, there have been many more passing-out parades and there is an increased police presence on our streets. Last Saturday in my electorate the local traders of Ashburton provided the local police station with pushbikes to do local patrols. That is what the

community wants. If the other lot had still been in charge, instead of that sort of initiative there would have been masses of closures of police stations and fewer police. Residents in the municipality of Boroondara in my area would have had only one police station, in complete contrast to what they have today.

The bill, particularly in clauses 14 and 15, provides that certain duties — for example, the handling of property — are to be done by public servants, thereby freeing up police members for court duties. That proposal is very much in line with the government's policy of ensuring that more police officers are available for duty. An additional 800 police will be trained during the term of this government.

Previous speakers have dealt with the remainder of the bill in some detail. In the main it deals with and clarifies the composition, procedures and powers of the Police Appeals Board. As a student of and lecturer on issues of good government and good governance, I commend the bill for ensuring that the processes will be transparent and efficient. The amendments in the bill are steps in that direction because they will provide greater transparency and efficiency in the conduct of the board, including clearer protocols for interaction between police command and the Director of Public Prosecutions. The bill contains a schedule listing reportable offences; some are very much to the point in that they relate to secret commissions, bribery of public officials, and misconduct in public office.

The bill is very much in line with good governance, which is what the Bracks Labor government is providing. It is governing for all of Victoria. It aims to ensure community safety and to build an efficient and professional police force. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — I note that in the second-reading speech on the Police Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill the Minister for Police and Emergency Services said the government was committed to ensuring that as many trained police members as possible would be available for operational duties. During his contribution to the debate the honourable member for Knox referred to such issues. He spoke about the matters raised by the honourable member for Richmond and others about police numbers and how the training of new police officers is progressing at the police academy.

Mr Smith — As did the member for Wantirna.

Mr COOPER — I am sorry, the honourable member for Wantirna also referred to that matter. I

knew that I would probably miss mentioning somebody from the long list of members who have contributed to the debate. I suppose that is why one should never mention names!

However, the response of the honourable member for Knox to the matters raised by the honourable member for Richmond brought to the attention of the house something that should concern honourable members — that is, although the police academy may be flat out training recruits, a steady stream — an increasing stream, if one believes the reports — of officers are leaving the police force. The honourable member for Knox said that problem needs to be addressed by the government and the community. The police force will never progress if that stream is not stifled and serving force members are not retained.

Much of that problem has to do with morale. The honourable member for Knox referred to the perceived lack of support for serving police officers following the S11 demonstration. Many members of the police force say the problem is not restricted to events such as the S11 demonstrations; police are not getting the level of support from the government, the community and the courts they believe they should be receiving in many aspects of their day-to-day work. There is nothing new about that. I have maintained close contact with the local police since I became a member of this place, and well before then when I was a local councillor. I am on a first-name basis with nearly all the local police officers.

There is nothing new in their complaint that they should receive greater support. However, I suggest to the house that perhaps the situation is worse today than it was in the past; the lack of support is a growing concern among members of the police force. Their reluctance to go out and put themselves on the line as much as they used to is increasing. They are saying that if they do this or that they may end up facing charges. More so than in the past they must be especially careful in the way they go about their duties.

I do not have an answer for the problem, and I suppose nobody in this place does. If somebody did have the answer the stream of officers leaving the force would have been stopped or slowed significantly by now. However, a member of this house who has had lengthy service in the force, such as the honourable member for Mildura, may be able to throw some light on the issue during debate on the bill. He may be able to assist our understanding of some of the day-to-day problems faced by serving police officers. We could start by looking at some of the duties now being carried out by the police but which should not be part of their duties.

The bill addresses part of the problem by having public servants deal with stolen property. Public servants are increasingly responsible for operating speed cameras and other duties. That is good because sworn police officers can be released into areas of need rather than being locked away carrying out clerical or other duties which should not be their concern.

One matter of increasing concern to me — and I would be surprised if it were not a worry to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services — is the number of police being used as jailers. An increasing number of people are being held in police cells but the government appears reluctant to talk about building new jails, even though there is clearly a need for them.

I believe the community would be apprehensive about home detention, which has been discussed by the government; it would have a big job on its hands trying to sell the idea of replacing detention within a penitentiary with home detention.

The figures on prisoners kept in police cells this year are: on 25 January, 268 prisoners; on 2 February, 304 — an increase of 13 per cent; and on 22 February — only a few days ago — 326 prisoners.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr COOPER — The honourable member for Melton asks when I will speak on the bill. In his second-reading speech the Minister for Police and Emergency Services clearly opened up the debate in regard to the better use of police. Rulings by former Speakers show that if a minister wants to narrow the debate his or her second-reading speech should be narrow. If a minister opens up the debate by referring to such matters in the second-reading speech, that minister must expect that the debate will touch upon matters he or she may otherwise not care to have had exposed.

I do not know whether the current Minister for Police and Emergency Services has that view or not, although the honourable member for Melton obviously does. The reality is that the minister's second-reading speech opens up the debate to ways in which sworn police officers are used. If the honourable member for Melton wishes me to quote from Mr Speaker's most recent ruling on the matter, I am happy to do so because I have it here! However, he may not want that!

I return to the point I was making before the interjection. The matter is of concern to the community, the police and the Police Association, and should also be of concern to all honourable members. On 25 January there were 268 prisoners in police cells. On 7 February the figure was 304, an increase of 13 per

cent. On 22 February the number had jumped to 326, an increase of 7 per cent on 14 days before. Worse still, there were 90 prisoners who had been in custody in police cells for 10 days or more on 25 January, 147 on 2 February, and 157 on 22 February. If any honourable member has not examined a police cell he or she should do so in order to understand why there is concern. On 25 January there were 16 prisoners who had been in custody in a police cell for 20 days or more — 18 per cent of the total number held in police custody; on 7 February, 69; and on 22 February, 76.

Lastly, I have figures for the number of prisoners who have been through the court system and been sentenced to a jail term. As no space is available for them in jail they are held in police cells. The figures are: on 25 January, 109; on 7 February, 113; and on 22 February, 105. The figure is hovering around an average of 108, which is not satisfactory. Prisoners are being subjected to incarceration and to sentences that are not the sentences either desired by the community or envisaged by the courts. Worse still, the prisoners are being looked after by sworn police officers, which is the great problem.

Mr Haermeyer — On a point of order, Honourable Acting Speaker, I did not raise a point of order earlier because I did not wish the debate to degenerate into a flurry of points of order. Acting Speaker Loney ruled it was reasonable for the lead speaker for the opposition, the honourable member for Wantirna, to make passing reference to the issue of police cells. I have no problem with having a fully-fledged debate on the issue but it is not germane to the bill. The honourable members for Wantirna and Mornington have made tenuous references to the issue of police being freed for other duties. However, I do not wish to become involved in a detailed debate on that point. I have shown tolerance in allowing the honourable member for Mornington to engage in debate on that matter for some time. He is now making it the major component of his contribution and it has no direct relation to the bill.

Mr COOPER — On the point of order, Madam Acting Speaker, I refer to the second-reading speech of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services of 23 November 2000, which is at page 1928 of the relevant volume of *Hansard*. I am unsure as to whether I may quote the relevant paragraph while dealing with the point of order, but unless I am pulled up I will quote a couple of sentences:

The government is committed to ensuring that as many trained police members as possible are available for operational duties. One measure Victoria Police is implementing to deliver on this outcome is to use its public service staff in the management of non-core policing roles ...

I refer now to page 78 of the February 2001 edition of *Rulings from the Chair*. On 21 October 1998 Speaker Plowman ruled that:

Following a point of order that a member was debating beyond the point of the bill, the Speaker stated that although the bill was a narrow one, when a minister gives a second-reading speech that opens up other areas, it gives members an opportunity to debate the points raised in that speech. If ministers want narrow debates, the Speaker stated that second-reading speeches should also be narrow.

I submit that in debating the issue of police morale and a point raised by the honourable member for Richmond, which was raised originally by the honourable member for Wantirna, responded to by the honourable member for Richmond and then responded to on this side of the house by the honourable member for Knox, in regard to declining police numbers or the fact that we do not seem able to increase police numbers because of — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! Will the honourable member conclude his point of order?

Mr COOPER — I am concluding it, Madam Acting Speaker. I am making the point that part of that is the non-core role police officers are being required to carry out in acting as jailers for prisoners held in police cells.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! I have heard enough on the point of order. I do not uphold the point of order at this time. Prior to taking the chair I listened to the debate, and a certain amount of latitude has been given, particularly to the lead speaker. However, I ask the honourable member for Mornington to carefully consider the clauses and to ensure that he is debating the bill.

Mr COOPER — Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I have made the point I wished to on this matter, in any case. We are dealing with the issue of police numbers and the reasons why for several years there has appeared to be an inability by anyone — not just with this government but also with previous governments — to halt the drain on police numbers. And that point has been made by every speaker so far in the debate. I made a point that nobody else has made — that is, it could well be that in addressing that issue the question of police having to act as jailers needs to be taken into account.

With its thrust on moving into some areas of police activity non-core personnel the bill should be absolutely supported, because that is something that successive governments have been doing for quite some time. The

more of that that is done, the better off the police will be in being able to put numbers out on the streets. But while there is an increase in the police cell population and police are being required to look after them, we will never be able to get on top of police numbers.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr COOPER — Despite the braying from the donkey on the hill, I have — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! I caution the honourable member for Mornington. He should be careful about the way he refers to honourable members.

Mr COOPER — Sorry, the honourable the donkey — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! I ask the honourable member to refer to honourable members in appropriate terms.

Mr COOPER — Madam Acting Speaker, when you stop him braying, I will stop calling him what I just called him.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr COOPER — You are braying; you are braying like a fool. You are acting like a fool.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order!

Mr COOPER — Having made those points, I am happy to leave the debate to others.

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — I am pleased to support the Police Regulation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. I have noted the comments of the honourable member for Wantirna and the honourable member for Knox, and I would like to briefly touch upon a couple of them. We really have to move on and try to find ways of resolving the issue of police numbers on a more positive note than by perhaps analysing history.

I want to make one point about what disappointed me in years gone by. When I raised the issue of police numbers I received a rather terse note faxed from the Chief Commissioner of Police indicating that if I did not withdraw the comments I had made he would consider taking legal action against me.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SAVAGE — No, it was not; it was when I was a member of this place. I think he would have had more appropriate measures of silencing me had I still been a

serving member. I have to say that it did give me some concern, and the now minister supported my position, which I am appreciative of. As history has proved, there was a major problem. I think it related to the flawed concept that you can put information technology in the place of manpower. However, I think we have moved on from that point.

Both sides of Parliament would realise that we need a healthy police force in terms of numbers and that police officers should be operationally well trained and suitably equipped. I note that the police academy is full, and I commend this government and the previous government on the steps they have taken to achieve that.

However, one of the great problems we face — and this was touched on by the honourable member for Mornington — is that the attrition rate is horrendous. I believe it is in the region of 25 members leaving the force a fortnight. When you are losing people with 20 years' service at that rate you are losing a vast pool of experience that is very hard to replace. That exacerbates the pressures being applied to the remaining supervisory and experienced members; likewise, it puts enormous pressure on the younger operational members of the police force and thus compounds the difficulty.

There is no doubt that a police officer has one of the most difficult occupations in society, and I speak from some personal experience. I think the legal profession, especially the members of the Magistrates Court, when dealing with some of the complex problems that face them directly as a result of the S11 protest, can do a significant amount of damage to morale in the police force and reduce the confidence of the community that people who behave inappropriately will receive due penalty and punishment. If people who have behaved in an extreme manner are not convicted it calls into question whether the judicial system is working appropriately and is reflecting the needs and views of our community.

The proposed legislation has the support of the Police Association, which is an appropriate step forward, because it makes significant changes relating to police disciplinary matters. Clause 4 limits the time for police members to lodge an appeal to 10 days; that is an appropriate change. Clause 8 imposes a 14-day time limit to apply for a review of a disciplinary or other personnel-related decision. It would be inappropriate to have unlimited time periods because that would create some difficulties with the administrative process involved with these types of issues.

Clause 5 requires the chief commissioner to consult the Director of Public Prosecutions. That is an appropriate measure, in that it is not limited to those offences which are scheduled. On a number of occasions there has been a complaint — I am not sure whether it has been generated by the deputy ombudsman's office — that there does not seem to be a reflection of direction when the deputy ombudsman refers issues back to the chief commissioner where disciplinary matters should take place. I think the complaint has been that the chief commissioner has not taken the advice of the deputy ombudsman. That clause will overcome that difficulty.

Procedural and functional changes to the Police Appeals Board are appropriate with regard to additional members and also when there is a conflict of interest.

I turn to clause 10. The honourable member for Richmond appropriately defined the need for closed hearings to members of the public in certain circumstances. I cannot imagine that provision being abused, and I believe it is appropriate to have such flexibility.

Clause 14 authorises public servants to deal with property. In my experience it has been a longstanding arrangement whereby unsworn members have dealt with property. In Mildura an unsworn member, Graeme Mitchell, has been handling property for many years in an appropriate way. The bill will delegate authority to him so that he does not have to work under someone else's authority, which is an appropriate measure. It provides recognition of the fact that persons other than sworn police members can deal with the peripheral issues relating to administration of the police force, which has successfully been supported for many years.

I support the bill and encourage the government to maintain good links with the Police Association and members of the police force through the chief commissioner to ensure good legislation that has consensus and delivers good outcomes to Victorians. If a high level of morale is not maintained within the police force and if police are made to feel they are not first-class citizens and not supported by the community, we will reap a bitter harvest. I do not believe society has ever been under such a threat from having so few resources in the police force. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr WILSON (Bennettswood) — I am pleased to contribute to the debate on the bill this afternoon. With the shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services and other opposition members I attended a departmental briefing on the bill and we were able to obtain a decent overview of the proposed amendments.

I concur with the shadow minister and express our appreciation to the ministerial and departmental officers who gave us a generous overview and hearing. The Liberal Party has consulted widely on the bill with various stakeholders, including the Police Association, and after due consideration has determined not to oppose it.

The bill deals with three major areas: firstly, police disciplinary and personnel matters; secondly, property in possession of police; and thirdly, fees or charges imposed for services provided by the police. I will restrict my comments to the first area under review, particularly to the Police Appeals Board.

The Police Appeals Board came into operation on 2 April 2000. The bill makes a series of refinements to the composition of the board and its procedures and powers. To give the board greater flexibility the bill allows the appointment of two or more deputy chairpersons. That is a reasonable decision by the government, but the opposition will be watching to see who is appointed. Along with the Victorian public, opposition members will be most disappointed if the government or the minister fails to appoint people of the highest calibre and public standing and instead appoints the usual parade of Labor Party hacks.

The opposition welcomes the changes and hopes they will reduce the number of unnecessary delays in the police disciplinary process. I note that some of the amendments can be described as building public confidence in the police disciplinary procedures, and I note that they are supported by police command.

Other changes include a greater and welcome role for the Director of Public Prosecutions in police disciplinary matters. As I noted earlier, the opposition does not oppose the bill and it hopes and trusts that the amendments will bring greater confidence, certainty and improved outcomes for the Victoria police force and its operations.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — I support the bill, which is part of the process of reviewing the operations of the Police Appeals Board. It is the appropriate way to deal with issues that have come to the attention of the government over the time it has been in operation. That is appropriate. Just as opposition members will continue to monitor the government's performance, the government will continue to monitor the performance of the Police Appeals Board in its operations and to finetune the procedures and processes within it. It adds transparency to the Police Appeals Board.

The clauses highlighted by other honourable members detail that transparency but also separate the powers and responsibilities between the deputy ombudsman, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Chief Commissioner of Police. That clarification has been highlighted since last April when the Police Appeals Board came into operation. The board was part of the policy the Labor Party successfully took to the people of Victoria in September 1999, and it is incumbent on the government to review legislation and ensure the board works correctly. That is what the legislation aims to do.

Clauses 9 to 12 deal with appeals and provide flexibility with regard to time limits for appeals. Clause 15 clarifies the process whereby a magistrate can determine property ownership. Clause 4 provides that an appeal must be lodged within 10 days. They are appropriate changes to the legislation.

I refer to contributions to the debate made by three honourable members today. The government has established a working party to examine attrition in the police force. I concur with the honourable member for Mildura — that is, it is imperative that the issues be examined so that Victoria fully supports and consequently retains its skilled police officers.

The government will also deal with the number of prisoners being kept in police lockups. Under the former government the prison population in police cells increased, but it did not act to rectify the problem because it was too busy privatising prisons. It should have planned to build additional police cells and prisons. The Bracks government will deal with that issue as quickly as possible.

The government's policy is the same as that of the former Kennett government. Prior to the last election whenever I visited a prison or attended a briefing in my capacity as shadow minister a ministerial adviser or a departmental officer would take copious notes and monitor what I said, what I did, where I went and who I talked to. I say to the Liberal and National parties: welcome to opposition. That is how you treated us, and that is how we have to treat you. I hope that circumstance will be reviewed in the future, but that is unlikely in the present circumstances. I support the bill.

Mr SMITH (Glen Waverley) — I have another point of view on the Police Regulation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. The senior police to whom I have spoken have serious reservations about the legislation because they feel — and they have not been given undertakings to the contrary — it could diminish the role of force command, particularly the provisions

regarding the establishment of the Police Appeals Board. They feel police policy on discipline could be subject to interpretation by the board and be dependent on who is appointed to the board. The senior police I spoke to asked me — I put the same question to the minister — whether the new board would be able to change the policies laid down by the Chief Commissioner of Police? Obviously the minister would say no. However, as I said, senior police are concerned about that prospect.

Senior police also believe new standards could be set because although the Police Appeals Board is classified as a board it will operate as a court, and courts follow their own precedents. Unlike common law, precedents set by previous police board cases could set new standards. As honourable members are aware, the Chief Commissioner of Police is responsible for the maintenance of integrity of the force. Consequently, he is completely responsible for discipline. Senior police are concerned about the bill specifying that two or three lawyers would be appointed to the new board. At the moment a highly respected retired judge and John Giuliano, in whom members of the police force have confidence, sit on the board. However, the judge who has been appointed cannot always be present at board proceedings because of his other duties as a reserve judge.

Senior members of the police force are concerned about the appointment to the police board of people who do not meet the same legal standards or experience as those set for a Supreme Court judge. As the honourable member for Wantirna suggested, it could be that someone from Slater and Gordon or a similar legal firm could well say he or she is a senior person and eligible for appointment to the board. There would be one loud scream if that happened and such an appointment could well undermine the board's judgments.

My next question goes to the end of the line: will the amendments remove the responsibility for police discipline from the Chief Commissioner of Police? The obvious answer from the minister would be no, but I would remain concerned. Could the responsibility be moved to the minister? The honourable members for Mornington and Wantirna mentioned the worries of senior police that police morale will be undermined not only at the lower or junior levels of the force but also at the top. The people on the board could be hearing cases that have gone to appeal; they would be setting new precedents. Consequently, morale throughout the force would be affected.

The opposition will be watching the operation of the new legislation in the same way it is watching the

appointment of the new chief commissioner. Something must be done soon, otherwise there will be an interregnum with no chief commissioner in office; someone will be acting in that role. I believe the Premier was quoted on radio a couple of days ago as saying an appointment to the position may not be made until the middle of the year.

Members of the Victoria Police are probably right in thinking that somebody outside Victoria is being considered. Recently Mr Ryan and his police command in New South Wales have been denigrated by articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. That sort of flow-on effect could happen in Victoria. The morale problem must be addressed quickly because the police force cannot have a long interregnum with an acting chief commissioner. The government has to make up its mind. Members of the Victoria Police will be disappointed if the new chief commissioner does not come from within the ranks of Victoria Police. The minister will probably bounce back and say the retiring chief commissioner, Mr Comrie, was recruited from outside Victoria, but I remind the minister that Mr Comrie's entire police service was in Victoria except for when he was a senior police officer in Brisbane; he later returned to Victoria.

The honourable member for Mildura said that the Police Association had given its support, although it was not consulted. The letter written by Paul Mullett to the honourable member for Wantirna said:

The Police Association ... has no issues to raise concerning the bill, only to state that we were not consulted by government.

The letter continues:

It follows that the association has no objections ...

It is fascinating that Paul Mullett has written that when the government said it would consult the police force. I am sure he would not say it if it were not so.

The government's claims to be open, honest and accountable are hypocrisy. That is what the Labor Party rattled off when it was in opposition, but it has not been accountable in consulting with people like Paul Mullett, the assistant secretary of the Police Association, or others. It is quite extraordinary.

Most people have given the bill the thumbs-up, but the minister must take on board the concerns of senior members of the police force about appointments to the Police Appeals Board. Honourable members want to hear from the minister that the roles of the police command and the chief commissioner will not be diminished and about the people to be appointed in the place of the busy reserve Supreme Court judge. If the

matter is not addressed the problems of discipline and morale in the police force will not be helped. Other honourable members have talked about police numbers and members leaving the force. There has to be a morale problem for a greater number of officers to be leaving than the number coming in to be trained.

I attended the wonderful open day at the police academy in my electorate last Sunday, where I talked to many police officers. They are proud of the force, but in order for them to maintain that pride the government must do more than just say it will address the issues, it must actually do so.

The honourable member for Melton mentioned a board that is supposed to try to keep police in the force. I do not know the solution, but unless something is done quickly to address the morale problem police officers will still be leaving the force at the rank of senior constable and sergeant, which is a worry. Those officers have 10, 15 or 20 years experience and are concerned about their jobs. They obviously have other jobs to go to, but there are many officers the police would like to get back into the force, and the government is facilitating the ability to do that.

The bill concerns some senior members of the police force, and I sincerely hope the minister will address their particular problems.

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — It is always a pleasure to speak on a bill that is part of a key election commitment. All government members are proud of it.

There has been much talk about morale. I am sure the Minister for Police and Emergency Services consulted widely, including talking to the Police Association, before the policy document entitled 'No more excuses on crime' was published. There would have been broad input.

The bill goes some way to addressing the problem of police morale. Non-core duties will be able to be done by public servants, including looking after seized or abandoned property. All honourable members would be aware that in any job one of the best things for boosting morale is to be freed up to do what one is actually being paid for. I am sure that whatever honourable members did before they entered Parliament, the times when they enjoyed their former jobs the most were when they were doing the job they felt they were employed for.

Police officers will have the chance to appeal against promotion decisions that have been made against them. That will boost morale by giving them a say in the decision-making process — they will be able to appeal.

Officers will know within themselves that the system allowed them to have a say.

The hierarchy of the police force has given the bill its full support. Even in their begrudging way opposition members must find it difficult to realise that the government is performing well and picking up on legislation the former government could also have introduced.

I spoke earlier to the parliamentary secretary, who informed me that one of the main provisions of the bill allows the relevant ombudsman to go directly to the Director of Public Prosecutions rather than having to go through the police commissioner himself — or herself if a female commissioner is appointed in the future. An ambiguous situation will be removed, which will give the public more confidence that it has a right to go to someone who has the power to address a situation that might be of concern.

My time is up. I congratulate the Minister for Police and Emergency Services on the current advertisements for police officers. That too is a great morale booster. I have already spoken to a few police officers who say the advertisements make them feel good about their job. I know how my colleagues and I felt about the importance of our jobs when the Australian Education Union advertisements promoted the work teachers do in the community.

I commend the bill to the house, and I commend the minister for the fantastic job he has done in getting everyone's full support.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — It is a pleasure to speak on the bill. It is often good to make changes to acts, and I have to commend the minister for this bill because it makes some good changes. In 1993 the then Minister for Police and Emergency Services quoted from the report of the 1985 Neesham committee of inquiry, stating:

Confidence in the police is influenced by the public perception of how police powers are exercised, how complaints are investigated and the credibility of police disciplinary mechanisms.

I agree with those sentiments. It is very important to have an open and transparent police force so Victorians can continue to have confidence in their force. That becomes even more apparent from talking to people who were born overseas, especially refugees who come from places where police are often corrupt and cannot be trusted. As I talk to people about the racial bill I still find a number of people who fear going to the police.

They need to be educated to make sure they understand that Victoria has the best force in Australia.

The bill amends the Police Regulation Act in three main areas — police disciplinary and personal matters, property in possession of police, and fees or charges imposed for services provided by public servants. I support that. It is interesting that when in opposition the present government was against public servants doing such work.

The bill increases the number of Police Appeals Board members by two or more. Being a former maths teacher, two or more could be from two to any number above two so I would like to know how many more than two is meant. The provision is good because it provides flexibility. However, care must be exercised to ensure that the appointees are not just Labor hacks. This Labor government is very proud of and is very good at doing that.

Proposed new sections provide that the chief commissioner will consult with the Director of Public Prosecutions before laying any charges, which is good. It allows the deputy ombudsman or the minister to refer to the DPP the question of whether criminal proceedings should be taken against a police member. I hope such steps will ensure that police numbers will increase because more police are needed. Even though more people are going into the force, more are going out of it. I pay credit to the police force in Victoria because it is the best in Australia.

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — I support the bill and express the view that the current Victorian police force has a good record compared to some in the past and in other states. However, all forces occasionally get a rotten apple in the barrel. The bill provides a swift and proper method to deal with such people and remove them from the force. That is good because such people are a blight on the police force.

It is bad if disciplinary actions are taken and the result is not clear cut and something lingers on. The bill imposes a time limit on applications for review so that cannot happen. There is also a time limit on the lodgment of appeals against promotions. If somebody on the panel is taken sick or is on leave, the bill provides for other people to deal with the case so it is not held up. That prevents further backlogs.

All the provisions in the bill are commendable. Much has been said recently in the papers about the way police behaviour has affected the public, but the effect such behaviour has on a large number of police and their families must also be considered. It must not be

forgotten that police are humans. They have families and they also need to have a clear path in disciplinary action and a fair go. For that reason a hearing can be closed to the public if it is deemed necessary. That is a welcome move.

I do not know why some police commands have expressed concerns about the bill and stated that they will watch how the tribunal will work and watch the people appointed to it. The tribunal will be open and transparent to those from both sides of the fence. It will operate fairly. The people who do the job will be open to checks and balances. The deputy ombudsman will have to consult with the Director of Public Prosecutions, which means that a public servant figure will be open to scrutiny. Having two bodies confer will provide a good opportunity to deal with matters that might otherwise go through the chief commissioner and therefore give the public the view that the police are looking after their own and hushing things up. The bill has broadened disciplinary procedure, which is welcomed.

I hope members of the force also understand and welcome the bill because it clarifies the items considered to be issues, how they are to be dealt with and whether they are minor misdemeanours or whether they are to be dealt with internally by the police disciplinary and ethics committee.

The other part of the bill that deals with civilians' properties releases commissioned officers and sworn officers to carry out the duties they are primarily employed to carry out. That is another welcome step. It clarifies the situation by enabling parties to argue cases in the Magistrates Court and receive rulings on property ownership. In many cases items are confiscated, used, taken or kept as evidence. A protracted argument might follow as to whom the property belongs. The opportunity of having a magistrate make that decision is welcome. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I thank the honourable members for Wantirna, Shepparton, Richmond, Knox, Burwood, Mornington, Mildura, Syndal, Melton, Bulleen and Keilor for their contributions to the debate on the Police Regulation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. I also thank the opposition and the National Party for their support of the bill. A number of matters, some of them germane to the bill and others not, were raised during the debate. I will pick up on some of those issues.

The honourable member for Wantirna referred to section 86P of the principal act and drew a comparison

between the deputy ombudsman's making a reference to the Director of Public Prosecutions in the case of criminal charges and what happens in the case of disciplinary charges. Although it is not really an issue, the government will be picking up the issue of discipline further down the track when looking at matters relating to the discipline system. Victoria has probably the best police discipline system in the country, which is one of the reasons it has the most decent and honest police force.

In any organisation with near 10 000 members there will be some bad eggs and unfortunately there are occasions where disciplinary charges, and regrettably even criminal charges, have to be laid. However, the mechanisms in place to, firstly, enforce good conduct among police officers, and secondly, to deal with issues that reach a disciplinary stage are the best of any state. That is not often understood by people who complain about and regard the role of the Deputy Ombudsman (Police Complaints) as being a toothless tiger. That is one of the expressions I have heard, not from anyone in the house tonight, but certainly as a complaint made in a recent newspaper article.

The Deputy Ombudsman (Police Complaints) has most of the powers of a standing royal commission into Victoria Police. He has very extensive powers. On top of that he is supported by a well-resourced ethical standards department within the police force, and every internal investigation conducted by the ethical standards department is also oversighted by him. He certainly has far greater powers than do any of the trumped up external tribunals in some other states, and that is one of the reasons Victoria does not have the problems with Victoria Police that other states have with their forces. Although I believe some minor refinements are needed to the way the system works, I am satisfied with the way it has served Victoria Police and the community.

The honourable member for Wantirna and a number of his colleagues also expressed concern about the Police Appeals Board being potentially stacked with what he referred to as Labor Party hacks as a payback for Labor Party mates. If he looks at who is on the board he will see it was newly formed in late 1999 as a result of changes to the Police Regulations Act. Is he suggesting that the people I appointed then, the likes of John Giuliano and Ros Hunt, are party hacks? Any minister who attempted to appoint party hacks to a position like that would not last long. It is important there be a high degree of public confidence in the Police Appeals Board, and that appointments to it not only have the respect of Parliament on a bipartisan basis but also have the respect of both the employer and the employee —

namely, Victoria Police and the Victorian Police Association.

The honourable member for Wantirna alluded to interference in the appointment of the Chief Commissioner of Police, as did the honourable member for Glen Waverley. The chief commissioner has always been a Governor in Council appointment, but unlike what has happened on previous occasions, this time the government has put in place a bit of an arm's length process. It has asked the secretaries of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Justice, a human relations expert and a senior police officer from another state — namely, the commissioner of the Australian Federal Police, Mr Mick Palmer — to conduct a short-listing process. They have been doing so assiduously and will be making recommendations shortly.

The government has been explicit about who will conduct the final interviews, and that will be the Premier, the Minister for Finance and me. The only criteria that apply as far as the appointment of the new chief commissioner is concerned is that the individual be the best possible and available person for the job.

The honourable member for Wantirna also raised the issue of Richmond Secondary College, which involved the dropping of disciplinary charges and subsequent conflict that arose between the then Deputy Ombudsman (Police Complaints) and the chief commissioner. The bill does not impinge on that in any way, but the chief commissioner has written to me under a provision of the Police Regulation Act asking me to resolve the issue. There are some legal technicalities in that issue and for that purpose I have referred it to Crown counsel for advice. I do not see that as being anything that is impinged upon by this act or anything that requires a political judgment. I think it is purely a legal one.

The honourable member for Wantirna also referred to police numbers. Although it does not have a great deal to do with the bill, I feel compelled to correct some of the statements that he and his colleagues made when they were asserting that police numbers were going backwards. The honourable member for Wantirna claimed that police numbers in June 1999 were approximately 9300. The figure that is used as the consistent benchmark is that of full-time equivalent police. Some police are full time and some are part time, and we work on the basis of a full-time equivalent as a benchmark. The figures that have been provided to me and certified by the assistant commissioner for human resources and development, Bill Severino, indicate that as at 13 June 1999 there were

9499.7 police. That is 800 fewer than it was three years previously.

By the time the government came to office in October 1999 that number had declined even further.

Despite promises by the Kennett government at the time of increasing police numbers by 400, it had deliberately reduced them by 800. By June 2000 that number was 9675.5, and by 31 January this year the number was 9723.6 — that is an additional 224 officers. The police academy is now full and we have a large group of recruits banking up. We have had over 14 000 responses to the police recruiting advertisements. We have absolutely no doubt that we will be able to achieve the approximately 2500 recruits that we require to make up the net 800 additional police the Labor Party was elected to engage.

The honourable member for Wantirna raised the issue of attrition. He claims that police are resigning from the police force at a rate greater than they are being taken in. Quite clearly on those statistics that is not the case. He has got it wrong. The attrition rate in the Victoria Police has oscillated over many years between 300 and 400 per annum, which is in the vicinity of 4 to 5 per cent; that is not unusual for any work force anywhere in the world. While we would like to reduce that figure, it is the case in all areas of public sector employment, particularly police, where you have highly regarded and disciplined employees, that they are very attractive to outside employers. People these days have a number of careers over time. Certainly we have a Police Association and Victoria Police working party that is working on ways to reduce that attrition rate. Whatever is the attrition rate — and it is not exceptionally high, as has been claimed — we will recruit 200 additional police each year over and above that to ensure the net target of 800 is met.

The honourable member for Shepparton quoted from a letter from the Police Association saying that it was not consulted by the government. That point was also picked up by the honourable member for Glen Waverley. I find that extraordinary when honourable members opposite, when in government, were vilifying the Police Association because it had the temerity to raise concerns about the cuts to police numbers. What in fact happened in the midst of the last enterprise bargaining negotiations between the Victoria Police and the Police Association three years ago was that, apart from taking a decision to cut police numbers by 800 to pay for the 3 per cent by three increase, they also withdrew the longstanding arrangement whereby the Police Association was reimbursed for legal costs in the

case of some of the defences it mounted on behalf of its members. That was a straight-out act of vindictiveness.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr HAERMEYER — We did consult with them. I have just written to the secretary of the Police Association pointing out that Mr Ian Dosser was fully briefed on this legislation quite recently and that the assistant secretary of the Police Association, Mr Kent, was given a preliminary briefing by me shortly after the bill was introduced and was asked to provide someone who could be further briefed on this issue. I believe this is a situation where the secretary of the Police Association has unfortunately been ill informed. The honourable member for Glen Waverley says of the Police Association that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing, so here we are taking another swipe at it.

I want to finish briefly on the complaint that the honourable members for Wantirna and Shepparton were not allowed to speak to the Chief Commissioner of Police. It is a longstanding tradition and a protocol that existed under the previous government that ministerial advisers sit in on all briefings to the opposition. That is to protect the public servants involved against them being misquoted or in some way abused during those briefings. Those protocols existed under the previous government. When I objected to the advisers to Minister McNamara and Minister McGrath sitting in, I was told that the briefing would not proceed unless the advisers sat in.

We then complained about not being able to visit prisons without an adviser. I asked Minister McGrath for permission to visit Port Phillip Prison soon after it opened. He rang me and told me he would approve that visit only if I did not go outside and criticise the prison. So much for openness. There is far more openness under this government than there was under the last. I remember the memorandum that was circulated from Minister McNamara that opposition members — it was not an all-embracing policy — were not to visit police stations until he specifically approved.

Therefore if your house is broken into or your dog has been stabbed, you cannot even go to your local police station to report it. These are the standards that operated under the previous government, so let us have no more of this hypocrisy.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clauses 1 to 4 agreed to.

Clause 5

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I move:

1. Clause 5, lines 2 and 3, omit 'after sub-section (1) insert' and insert 'for sub-section (1) substitute'.

The amendment is a simple procedural one. The bill was originally intended to go through the chamber in the spring session last year. It has been held over to this sessional period, and that requires a couple of small changes in relation to dates that do not in any way affect the substance of the bill.

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — We accept the amendment because it was explained to us very well in the briefing that the earlier Police Regulation (Amendment) Bill of 1999 contained a clause that was to be enacted on 1 January 2001, so as the minister said, if the bill had been debated last spring there would have been no need for this amendment, but we now accept it.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 6 to 17 agreed to.

Clause 18

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I move:

2. Clause 18, omit this clause.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause negatived.

Reported to house with amendments.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

HEALTH SERVICES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health).

Sitting suspended 6.27 p.m. until 8.02 p.m.

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — The Health Services (Amendment) Bill reverses the effects of the Health Services (Community Health Centres) Bill debated in 1997. That bill removed elected boards and replaced

them with appointed boards. I contributed to debate on that bill in April of 1997; now I find myself on the other side of the chamber speaking on what is, in effect, a bill to reverse what was achieved in 1997 and, at the same time, reflecting on the vagaries of politics.

I could not call it a pleasure, but I have found that in politics I need to read what I said some years ago to determine whether I still hold the same beliefs. I put myself through the agony of reading my 1997 speech and discovered that I still believe what I believed then, but now I am arguing differently. I well remember the argument I mounted in 1997, much of which centred around the notions of democracy. I will revisit those notions during this contribution. I remember the then members for Albert Park and Bendigo West, now the health and Workcover ministers respectively, making impassioned speeches at the time, as did the honourable members for Essendon, Coburg and Ivanhoe. Later I shall allude to their contributions.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I should like to spare them the agony, but I cannot because I do not believe they will deliver in government what they purported to believe when they contributed to the 1997 debate.

The first matter I take up is the fallacy of the argument in the second-reading speech that the bill fulfils an election commitment. That is fudging the issue somewhat. The Labor Party's election commitment was to restore democracy to community health centres. I looked up the meaning of the word 'restore' in the *Oxford Dictionary* and found that it means to bring back to its original state or condition. In other words, the election policy of the Labor Party was to restore or bring back fully elected boards. That is not what the bill prescribes. The Minister for Health, the then opposition spokesman, in 1997 called the legislation a compromise. Even by the standards of the honourable member's impassioned speech in 1997, the bill is a compromise. The bill is not an election commitment being fulfilled but a shandy being paraded as an election commitment.

Imagine the surprise of the Labor Party when it went armed with its restoration policy and found that there was a deal of support for appointed board members. To its credit, the Labor Party has listened to the people, backed down on its election commitment and presented the house with a shandy.

Tonight the house is to debate the proposal that a sensibly sized board of 7 to 9 members, of which 4 or 5 will be elected and 2 to 4 appointed, will form the

boards of the 41 community health centres. The second-reading speech refers to the 113 written submissions that were received. By my mathematics, it flows from what the government has said that 33 favoured full election, 54 favoured a shandy and, I presume, 26 supported appointed boards in some form or another. The bill is the result of that consultation.

One of the arguments advanced in the second-reading speech for moving to the compromise has been that the criticism of the current board appointment process has led to the disenfranchisement of communities from their community health centres. The common example to highlight that concern is the reported decline in community health centre memberships as a result of the removal of the right to vote at board elections. That is an astonishing admission. Does it mean that the only reason those roles existed and that people were members of community health centres was to vote in elections? If the answer is yes, it is a sad commentary on those electoral roles. If the answer is no, why is it argued in the second-reading speech that that is a major reason for moving away from the present model?

The logic of the second-reading speech is not consistently found in the policy as evinced in the legislation. If the argument is that one does not want people disenfranchised because they cannot vote at board elections, why has there been no move by the Labor Party to direct elections of boards of entities such as hospital networks or small community and rural hospitals? There is no such policy, so far as I know. Is the argument, therefore, that the people who work for those hospitals have been disenfranchised? That is not the case around the country. It is illogical that the government has tried to dress up what it had to deliver in the form of an election commitment.

It is asserted in the second-reading speech that consumer and community involvement is a process that constitutes best practice in primary care. If one encourages the active participation of consumers there are successful outcomes in the longer term. Where is that evidence? If achieving better patient outcomes is behind putting elected positions back in place, one would expect a reasonable body of research to be forthcoming. The government can cite anecdotal research and theories and talk in generalities, but the internationally recognised Cochrane Centre based in Oxford, which has centres throughout the world, including Australia, provides systematic, up-to-date reviews of research into health care. However, it provides only systematic reviews of that gold standard in health care research, randomised control trials.

One piece of research, the closest I can find within that gold standard to consumer and community involvement, was titled ‘Local opinion leaders: effects on professional practice and health care outcomes’. That paper comes up with a very mixed conclusion, not at all in tune with the argument propounded opposite, that research outcomes are all on one side. The paper found that the impact of local opinion leaders on health care practice is, at best, mixed. True, it found that theoretically local opinion leaders can influence the behaviour of their colleagues, but exactly how that influence is exerted remains unclear — that is, it all seems to make sense, but how it happens is unclear.

The conclusion of the paper is most telling. It concludes that while most trials found some benefit in using local opinion leaders to improve practice only a few found any important impact on patient outcomes. By contrast, the second-reading speech does not even argue that there might be such a benefit but simply asserts it as fact, despite the fact that such an assertion is not borne out by any serious reading of available research.

There is an intellectual confusion here. The government is looking for improved patient outcomes and community involvement — both very worthwhile goals, and I agree with them. Community involvement is an important part of the governance of community health centres, and that is why the first two criteria for selection of board members were all about community involvement. However, there is a confusion in the thinking of the government about community involvement benefit. The government says it can deliver it by delivering people at board level. I would have thought the way to deliver a community involvement benefit would be to deliver it at program level or at service delivery level. The government, however, makes no attempt to distinguish between the two, or to suggest which might be the more viable way to go.

When I think about a board and what it should be doing, my thoughts are consistent with what I said in 1997 — namely, that the board should be there to ensure the community health centre can deliver programs. The question is, is the board there to determine those programs? That is an age-old question being faced at board level.

The former Kennett government attempted to define and separate the functions of management and governance. I argue that there is confusion in the mind of the government about the real role of community benefit people at governance level. Surely it is not to determine which programs should be delivered, but

rather to make sure that the health centre can deliver those programs.

I turn briefly to the history of community health centres. I offered a view when I spoke on the matter in 1997, and my view has not changed. The history of community health centres has not always been particularly glorious. For example, when there is a roll of electors the board can be subject to capture and manipulation, and stacking is the way it is done.

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr DOYLE — We will come to that, don't worry. We will talk about McIvor Health and Community Services, Barwon Health and all that. Keep going!

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr DOYLE — Sometimes the roll of electors can be very small. In 1997 the smallest roll of electors — —

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr DOYLE — Stop barking at me. Wait your turn. Let's see if you can say something sensible for a change.

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr DOYLE — It is like listening to a chihuahua. As I said, the history of community health centres has not always been glorious. There have been problems with some centres. In 1997 the smallest electoral roll had 11 names on it, and its task was to determine a board of 12 people. In other words, there were 11 people eligible to take up 12 positions. Gee! That must have been a difficult election year after year! If someone had wanted to capture and manipulate that board, they could easily have done it. All you would need to do to get on the roll of electors would be to write to the chief executive officer. That did happen.

In 1997 the largest of the electoral rolls was Bellarine, with a roll of 775. It is represented by an excellent local member. In 1995 when the elections were held Bellarine did not need an election because only the requisite number of people applied for places on the board. The government may believe in community participation, but the reality of what was happening when the law was changed in 1997 was not the rosy picture painted by the Labor Party. As I said in the debate in 1997, in 1995 when people exercised their democratic right to vote in elections for community health centre boards, throughout Victoria only 1709 people actually voted. Even if we are talking

about democracy and all of the 775 people on the electoral roll of the Bellarine Community Health Centre had voted, it would represent only 2 per cent of the population catchment of the Bellarine Community Health Centre. Let us not be too precious about what the bill is doing in this instance.

I mentioned before that a similar debate took place in 1997 and a number of honourable members contributed to that debate. It is worth while referring to some of the comments of those honourable members. I take up the rabid interjection of the honourable member for Frankston East about the stacking of boards. Prior to the suspension of the sitting the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in concluding the debate on the Police Regulation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill said, 'If I appointed hacks to a board it would come back and hit me in the face'. I mean this in many ways — what a difference an election makes! When the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and his colleagues were in opposition that was exactly the assertion they were making. Now they say with straight faces, 'We did not believe what you said in 1997, but we believe it now'. That demonstrates a constancy of principle!

Members of the then opposition contributed to the debate in 1997. The then honourable member for Albert Park, now Minister for Health, said in his contribution that the bill would mean government cronies would be stacked onto boards to do the government's bidding in community health matters. Name one case where it happened? It is easy to say in Parliament that is what will occur, but I ask members of the government to name one example where it actually happened. The government removed a member of the board of the Barwon health centre and appointed the spouse of a member of the local branch of the Labor Party — a person who had sued the hospital. Don't talk about stacking and cronyism! During the debate in 1997 the honourable member for Albert Park in demonstrating his paranoia said:

This is about shipping in Liberal Party cronies from the blue-rinse suburbs and putting them in community health centres in our areas.

I wonder if the honourable member believes that? Where did it happen? We should be serious about this. That statement is ludicrous. The honourable member then said that the real agenda is fourfold. He said its purpose was to force amalgamations between community health centres, to have hospital networks running the system with the government stacking the network boards with its own cronies and so on. The second agenda he said was to force privatisation on to the community health system.

The third agenda was to stop criticism from community health centre boards of budget cuts in state health care cuts. The fourth was to stop the concept of community development. I ask government members to point out one time from 1997 onwards when the then member for Albert Park, the current Minister for Health, has said, 'This is what you have done. I warned about it in 1997'. He has not done so because it has not happened. In 1997 he made a speech not about what he believed but about what he wanted to object to.

One of the strong objections the honourable member for Albert Park had at the time and something he said was an outrageous, terrible thing was:

It also provides the minister with the power to remove any member of the board at any time, at will, without reason. One can only presume that that completely unfettered power will be used as a means to ensure that new appointments toe the government line, because new appointees know if they put their hands up for their community or in any way contradict or criticise the government they will be sacked by the minister.

They are strong words, are they not? Isn't it an appalling principle? Yet the bill before the house is sponsored by the same member who made that speech. Proposed new section 50(3) states:

The Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister, may remove a member of a board from office, whether the member was appointed, elected or co-opted.

So what he so stringently objected to on principle as opposition health spokesman in 1997 he now champions. What hypocrisy! If it was so objectionable in 1997, why did he not remove it from the bill? If it was so objectionable when he was in opposition, why is it so acceptable now that he is the minister? It is unbelievable!

The interesting part is that he also went on to say:

That will be the end of community health and the start of grand amalgamations ...

It did not happen. He had a whack at companies such as Mayne Nickless and Australian Hospital Care, an entrepreneurial medical company. It now runs 30 per cent of the private beds in Victoria and Australia and helps to prop up the public system, working in cooperation, as it always has, with the private and public sectors in Victoria — but it was the villain then.

Then he said:

Members could have been coopted, or a compromise could have been reached where some members were elected and some were appointed.

So given his speech in 1997, the bill that is before us is a compromise — not what he was arguing for at the time, but a compromise — and you have to ask why that is.

In 1997 he said the legislation that the then government had introduced would:

... destroy the good work done by community health centres.

He also said the then government would:

... stack boards with Liberal Party members in order to further their political fortunes.

As I look behind me I do not see many people who have come to this place through the ranks of community health centre boards or the federal Parliament. I may be mistaken, but it seems like a wild claim now that I look back on it.

Mr Helper — Are you supporting the bill?

Mr DOYLE — At least I am consistent in my view. The interesting part is — —

Government members interjecting.

Mr DOYLE — In this place you have to have an attention span slightly longer than 15 minutes. Just hang on and we will get to it.

The then honourable member for Bendigo West, now the Minister for Workcover, also talked about community health centres. He said he did not want people appointed, irrespective of whether they represented the views of the community. He said appointments were a backward step. Yet the bill that he approved in cabinet, and presumably in caucus, appoints people. He is reported as saying:

The government would have us believe ... there will not be the stacking of boards; people will not be cleaned out; there will not be the appointment of mates. If that were true, why are the transitional arrangements that the government has spoken about being put in place?

Again, where did it happen? Towards the end of his speech, the Minister for Workcover said that what we were doing was wrong and:

... against the wishes of community health centres that want to continue with the present arrangement where board members are elected, an arrangement that has worked extremely well.

Does the Minister for Workcover still believe what he said? That is not the bill that is now before the chamber, yet that is exactly what he said in 1997.

I will not go on too long, but the honourable member for Ivanhoe also made a contribution. I had to flick through to that! I remember shaking in my boots when he said:

... I will be policing whatever board there is and making certain that the people appointed to it are not Liberal Party members.

A government member interjected.

Mr DOYLE — He did not come to me and tell me, so I can only presume that his policing efforts were entirely satisfactory. We have a good relationship, and I am sure the honourable member for Ivanhoe would have drawn any irregularities to my attention with some glee. I can only presume he was perfectly satisfied with the board at his community health centre.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DOYLE — I am disappointed that the honourable member for Coburg is not here, because he is reported as saying:

The government wants to get rid of community-minded people who have worked hard for their communities ...

Did he come in here at any stage in the ensuing three years and say, 'Look, that is where you did it!?' No, he did not.

There are many of those examples, and while I could gain a great deal of amusement in doing so, I will not go on. What is being delivered is not what members opposite said they would deliver. When it was easy they just got up and bagged the other side.

They are delivering a cocktail of appointed and elected members, and as I say, I have the same view about that now that I had then, which is that it is a confusion of mandate. Some people will be there on the say-so of the minister and others will be serving a constituency which will have elected them directly and which, presumably, they will have lobbied for election. When that confusion of mandate exists at board level problems may — I am not saying they will, and I hope they do not — arise. That is why the previous government's consultation process — even the honourable member for Albert Park, now the Minister for Health, said in his speech at the time that it consulted on the bill — led it to believe that was not the way to go.

The government says that its consultation process led it to believe that is the way to go. I simply point out that that is not what Labor promised in 1997 and it is not what it promised when it went to the people on its

election platform of restoring what was there before. However, I acknowledge that the government has the right to introduce the bill.

At departmental briefings I have been told that a system that no-one has been able to demonstrate to me will achieve improved patient outcomes will cost \$100 000 a year to implement. I am concerned that nowhere is it evinced exactly what the system will do to improve community health centres for the extra \$100 000 a year that will now be spent on them.

I turn to the specifics of the bill and the two parts of it that are of concern to me. The first is proposed new section 49, inserted by clause 3, which again demonstrates that the government is more concerned with process than with product. In a very small bill proposed new section 49 consists of five pages that deal with casual vacancies, and not with the product that Victoria will get in the form of the board of management. At least when we brought our bill into the house in 1997 we talked about the sort of board we wanted, what we hoped for and what we needed. However, a large part of the bill before us deals only with the process of electing people to fill casual vacancies.

The second part of the bill that I consider interesting is proposed new section 51(4), inserted by clause 3. After all the hoo-ha about the importance of elected board members, the bill substitutes the proposed new catch-all section 51(4), which provides:

If the board is, after making all reasonable efforts to do so, unable to obtain sufficient nominations to fill the number of vacancies to be filled by an election, the Governor in Council may appoint a person or persons to fill such a vacancy.

Even the government's own election process is undermined by the fact that it recognises —

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The honourable member for Frankston East asks what is wrong with that. The whole purpose of the bill is to elect people, and yet the government says that appointment is a perfectly acceptable substitute for election. That is what is wrong with it! If the honourable member cannot work that out, he has not done any thinking.

When we introduced our bill the honourable member for Albert Park, now the health minister, delivered his speech, which I recall was a wonderful piece of histrionics. His approach was to start with outrage and move on from there. I presume his outrage was not quite great enough to make him do now in this bill what he said at the time he was going to do.

Just in case honourable members have forgotten history, I will remind them of Labor's glorious history of commitment to community participation on boards of community health centres, its conviction that elected boards should provide that participation and its determination to go away from a system in which it has not been able to point out a single thing that works against the benefit of the community except its own policy-driven ideology of having board elections.

Let us look at what happened in the recent history of the previous Labor government. In 1986 the then health minister, Mr White, dismissed the management committee of the St Albans Community Health Centre. I could go on a little more specifically about that committee of management but I will not because I am, after all, a generous person. However, Minister White dismissed that committee of management because of a report alleging mismanagement, nepotism and misconduct at the centre.

In 1986 the health department reviewed an audit report that showed that there had been misappropriation at the Whittlesea and Lalor Community Health Centre. In 1992 Maureen Lyster, a health minister for whom I had some respect — and still do — sacked the management of the Broadmeadows Community Health Centre, saying it had been incapable, inefficient and negligent.

In 1997 the Labor Party said the government was doing all these threatening things like amalgamating the community health centres with these networks. However, in government the Labor Party had the chance to disaggregate Broadmeadows from Northern Health if it wished to, but it did not do it. The government had the chance to do it, it could have done it and it did not. Look at the history of management the government has been left with there.

At the time Mrs Lyster's spokeswoman said that that sacking did not set a precedent. Five months later she sacked the boards of four community health centres — Kensington, Ascot Vale, Flemington and North Melbourne. There were claims at the time that she had been protecting political cronies. The history has not exactly been glorious.

Given all of that I do not think what the government has brought here today is the best result. The government has given a nod towards what we did because it has recognised that it needs a mix of skills on the board, that it needs to ensure that people with appropriate health, community and managerial expertise are on that board. The government has recognised that by saying that it will have appointed people on the board as well as elected people.

I say, with a little more generosity of spirit than was offered by the then opposition in 1997, that I hope the bill does better for community health centres. We know that the clients of a community health centre tend to be vulnerable people who do not access other areas of our health system. If what the government is doing is an improvement, I will applaud that and I will say so, but it had better not be just ideologically driven. It must be monitored; it must be something where one goes back and looks objectively at what benefits have been delivered to the clientele of that community health centre.

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr DOYLE — Remember, the government has put up no argument about why things have gone wrong in the past three years. There has not been a single argument about that.

Further, I hope the government has had the grace — which it has not had as it has got rid of other boards — to write to the people who have without remuneration served the state on this board and thank them for the time they put in. If the government has not done that already, I hope those letters are out tomorrow. Those people served extremely well, without remuneration, not for a coalition government or a Labor government but because they believed in their community health centres.

I hope the government improves the board. However, I have no conviction that there is any intellectual, philosophical, political or clinical decision making behind this. My fear is it is purely ideological and the challenge is for the government to prove me wrong.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — It is a great pleasure to follow the honourable member for Malvern in speaking on a health bill. I have enormous respect for his knowledge and expertise in this area.

Mr Leighton — Following the Libs.

Mr MAUGHAN — It is not following the Libs at all. I have a great deal of respect for the honourable member for Malvern's knowledge of and contribution to the health industry. I share the sentiment expressed in his concluding comments. If this government is going to deliver a better service to the people we represent, I will be the first to applaud that.

However, I have some concerns about this bill. I believe it is largely ideologically driven, but we will wait and see. I am a generous soul; I will wait and have a look at the outcomes. I have my concerns and, like the honourable member for Malvern, I ask what we will get

for the extra \$100 000 that this ideologically driven project will cost the community. I will reserve judgment, but I hope the bill delivers a better outcome for the people I represent.

The purpose of the bill is to amend the Health Services Act 1988 and to provide for elected and appointed members of the community health centres. We have had appointed members, and this legislation will change that. Let me state right from the start that the National Party will not oppose this legislation. We believe there has been widespread community consultation, we accept that, and although we have some concerns about the legislation we will not be opposing it.

The National Party supports the concept of community health centres. Community health centres provide education and work towards both prevention and improving community health. Their purpose can best be summed up by saying that community health centres emphasise prevention to minimise illness and disability. To that degree, community health centres contribute a great deal.

I enthusiastically support the general notion of prevention rather than cure. It is beyond dispute that many health problems may be avoided with proper education and changing behaviours. The Victorian community has been successful in changing behaviours such as drink-driving and smoking, and I am optimistic that other behaviours destructive of people's health can be changed. Community health centres play an important role in changing those behaviours to the benefit of the individuals concerned. As a secondary but nonetheless important consideration costs to the community in the provision of acute health care are also reduced.

As I said, the consequences to health of smoking are well documented and well known. Education undertaken by various governments has been effective, and smoking and its adverse effects on health have been reduced in many sections of the community. Very few of my friends now smoke. At dinner parties it is rare for people to smoke. Only today I was trying to obtain a box of matches from someone. Try to get a box of matches from someone in the house and you will find out how many honourable members or people in other social groups with which one is involved smoke. I compliment the work of Vichealth and Quit in changing community behaviours to acknowledge the dangers of smoking and reduce the incidence of smoking-related diseases.

The drug and alcohol program is an important part of the work of community health centres. Unfortunately, encouraging community behaviours in the responsible use of alcohol has not been so successful. It is still a major problem because misuse of alcohol causes death, injury, the break-up of families and much misery in the community. We have a long way to go in changing community behaviours in drug use, but I will leave that debate for another day. Community health centres also play an important role in the mental health field and in assisting problem gamblers.

Drugs are a major problem in the community. I support the recent initiative of the police commissioner for a bipartisan approach that relies on education, detoxification units and rehabilitation. Community health centres are involved in all those activities. The level of drug use in the community is unacceptable. It is to the shame of us all that deaths from heroin overdose continue to rise. It is an indictment of the community and all of us in this place. We must continue to strive in a bipartisan way to find solutions to those problems.

Community health centres also do important work in diabetes education. Diabetes must be detected early and treatment initiated to avoid the consequences of untreated diabetes. High blood pressure, excessive cholesterol levels and obesity are consequences of the lifestyle led by so many people in the community, including honourable members in this place. Community health centres do a great job promoting healthy lifestyles based on better nutrition, less fat, more exercise, a moderate consumption of alcohol and lowering the adverse effects of the consumption of food and alcohol. All those changes lead to better health in the community generally, better health for individuals and less cost in dealing with health problems.

Mr Wilson — Depressing.

Mr MAUGHAN — I am sorry you are becoming depressed. We can continue to enjoy food and alcohol. I am talking about consuming them in moderation. I think we can enjoy both, but in moderation, without becoming obese and suffering health problems.

In passing, I reflect on the fact that community health centres are heavily involved in prevention rather than cure; they want to educate the public and try to prevent some of the consequences of not dealing with those problems. I am absolutely passionate about the concept of prevention rather than cure — of spending \$1 now rather than \$100 down the track — and I feel strongly about early intervention in childhood development. It is beyond dispute that a person's behaviour is very much

determined by what happens in the first five critical years of life.

It never ceases to amaze me that, as a community, we are always stretching to find sufficient resources to ensure that our children have adequate resources such as speech therapy and child psychology — all the specialist services that are so crucial in the first five years of life. I passionately believe resources should be moved from other areas such as acute health and education into early childhood development. Why? Because, as I have already indicated, prevention is far better than cure. A dollar spent in the early stages is much better than \$100 spent later on. Therefore, I am a strong supporter of the work of community health centres.

The vision set out in a submission from the Victorian Healthcare Association Ltd says it all about what community health centres are about. In its submission it states as its vision essentially that community health centres should:

... put patients and communities at the centre of their attention and deliver innovative and responsive services to meet their needs.

It is most important that they be patient centred — to put patients first and concentrate on their needs. I query whether the government has at the centre of what is driving it the delivery of services to patients or whether some of the moves it is making are driven more by ideology rather than by delivering better services to patients.

The vision is also that community health centres continue to:

... focus on strategies that aim to improve the health status of a given community;

facilitate access to services for at-risk groups in the community who traditionally don't use or have difficulty accessing the service system ...

emphasise prevention and minimise illness and disability;

provide a comprehensive range of services and work with other providers to ensure consumer needs are met in a timely manner ...

commitment to quality improvement and improving health outcomes; and

encourage community participation.

I think all sides of the house would agree that they are fine and worthwhile goals. I hope there is bipartisan support of those objectives; the way we go about achieving them is where there will probably be some differences of opinion. However, we are not miles apart

in what we are doing — and I think we are all aiming in the one direction.

I cannot help but note that community health centres, which were established by the Cain Labor government in, from memory, around 1983 or 1984, unfortunately got off to a bad start. The concept was fine but, as we have already heard from the honourable member for Malvern, many of the centres were wound up by Labor ministers at the time, for very good reasons. While the concept was good, in the way that Labor works I think many of the centres became a means of providing employment for those who were sympathetic to the Labor side of politics but who were not necessarily the best people to — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr MAUGHAN — Yes, many of them were probably card-carrying members. The point that concerns me is that in the early days many of the community health centres were not primarily focused on delivering services to the community.

That is not just my view; Labor ministers wound up many of the community health centres, as was documented by the honourable member for Malvern. Under the coalition government community health centres became far more accountable and focused in delivering those services. I hope that is what can be focused on — delivering the best services for the community.

The bill deals with 41 community health centres. There are approximately 65 community health centres in the community, 35 of which are incorporated. Forty-one will be caught up by the legislation. I note that most centres are in the metropolitan area. There are no community health centres in the electorate of Rodney. Some services come in from Bendigo or Shepparton to the perimeters of my electorate. A community health centre in Echuca does great work, but it is under the umbrella of Echuca Regional Health, so it does not come under the bill.

Essentially the bill changes the governance of community health centres from fully appointed boards appointed by the minister and Governor in Council to part appointment, part election. Clause 3 states:

For sections 46 to 51 of the Health Services Act 1988 substitute —

“46. *Board of management*

- (1) There shall be a board of management of each community health centre.

- (2) The board of management of a community health centre shall consist of not less than 7 and not more than 9 members, of whom —
 - (a) not less than 4 and not more than 5 are to be elected by and from the electors of the community health centre in accordance with the regulations ...

It is moving from a fully appointed board to a part appointed, part elected board, and I welcome that move. It is a step in the right direction, although I agree with the comments made by the honourable member for Malvern. However, I believe so long as the broader community takes an interest in who is being elected to such boards, potentially more community-responsive boards could be elected, if the community is careful about the people it elects.

Clause 3 refers to an amendment to the Health Services Act and to an appointed or elected member holding office for three years. Continuity of representation is an area of concern. Under the bill it is theoretically possible that there could be a complete change of personnel on the board of a community health centre every three years. I do not believe that is desirable and I do not believe the government believes it is desirable, but there is no guarantee that that will not happen. I suggest it would be an improvement if a mechanism were in place to ensure some continuity within the board of directors rather than allowing the potential for change every three years. That point was made in a letter from the Victorian Healthcare Association, which states:

VHA has a major concern that the bill has the potential to be very disruptive to boards of community health centres in that every three years a whole new board will be constituted. No mechanism exists within the legislation to ensure there is continuity between the new and the old boards. This is a most unusual situation for an independent community organisation to find itself in. Continuity of boards membership is vitally important in ensuring that organisation knowledge is maintained and passed on to the new members.

That view of the Victorian Healthcare Association was expressed in a submission to the government, and I support the sentiments expressed in that letter.

It is also important that the community, in electing its representatives, elects people with the requisite skills and expertise, people with experience as board members of other organisations, people with experience in the health industry, people with planning and analytical skills or experience as consumers. It is important that the consumer viewpoint is represented on the board. I welcome the greater involvement of the community. I support the initiative of more community consultation so that the community has some control

and say over primary health care, the models of service deliveries and ways to encourage greater community participation.

I hope it will be genuine consultation and not the sham, the con and the selective way the government sometimes consults. I refer to an incident today when the Minister for Agriculture was asked why he was not prepared to consult with the barley growers whereas he was prepared to consult with the dairying industry on similar legislation. I simply ask why he was not prepared to consult with the barley growers.

Ms Davies interjected.

Mr MAUGHAN — We have had years, we did consult, but the government places great store on consulting with the community. I could give many examples where that is more the image than the actuality. The incident dealt with today is one.

I accept that the community generally is in favour of the legislation. I note the new legislation is expected to come into effect on 1 April but that the new boards will not take office until the first annual general meeting, which will be held in the last couple of weeks of October, so there is another eight or nine months before it comes into effect.

The National Party spokesman on health, the Honourable Ron Best in another place, has consulted widely with the community to get its views about the legislation. There is general support for the changes proposed by the government. We have expressed a number of concerns: about continuity within the board, as expressed in the Victorian Healthcare Association letter; about whether community health centres will be adequately funded by the government; and that stakeholders in the broader catchment may not be represented on the board, an issue to which the honourable member for Malvern referred.

In conclusion, the National Party supports the concept of well-run and well-resourced community health centres and acknowledges that there has been consultation with the community. The National Party has some concerns, which I have attempted to express, but accepts that the changes have community support and therefore does not oppose the bill.

Mr VINEY (Frankston East) — I thank the honourable member for Rodney for his contribution. I have noted that in many debates on human services the honourable member speaks from the heart. He demonstrated his understanding of the role of community health centres, particularly that of providing services to disadvantaged people within the

community. I was disappointed that the honourable member took the opportunity to make what I thought was a rather gratuitous criticism of staff members of community health centres. I felt that was unnecessary, but I also accept the acknowledgment that the National Party, although it cannot bring itself to say it supports the legislation, will not oppose it.

I noted also that the honourable member for Malvern was not able to make it clear whether the Liberal Party would support, oppose, or not oppose the legislation. In fact, he left us all hanging as to where the Liberal Party stands. That shows the distance the Victorian Liberal Party still has to travel to understand what really happened in 1999 and to realise that the community rejected arrogance and the kind of approach the former government took to removing elected representatives from community health centres.

If there is an opposition member who almost embodies the approach of arrogance it would have to be the honourable member for Malvern. He does not listen to the concerns of the community. He has not listened to the messages and is not able to bring himself to make any meaningful contribution to the debate. His contribution lacked any ideas or substance, and it certainly had no policy position apart from the one that said, 'I was right'. The small bits of contribution he made when he touched on matters relating to the bill showed some misunderstanding of what is intended. He finished with the criticism that the bill is ideologically driven. I suppose that is an easy shot.

If one is going to say that it is ideologically driven, one has to ask what is the ideology. It is something called democracy, something called elections, where people who use a community health centre, whether they are clients, employees or volunteers, and are employed in the local region or who live in the local region are entitled to get together and determine who they would like to see representing their interests on a board of management.

The honourable member for Malvern and the Liberal Party fail to understand that in government they confused the means by which good health outcomes are delivered and the means by which good policy is delivered with objectives. They confused the means of having good business practice as being the goal. The former government set up boards and structures with the goal of providing sound business management. That is the means by which community health centres should deliver health and public health outcomes to the community, not the goal. The former government took an approach to governing community health centres that was likened to managing a business. That is what

took place under the previous government, with its ideological position of privatisation and outsourcing, and that position flowed into things like governance.

The bill aligns the basic objective of a community health centre, which is delivering good public health and community health outcomes for a local area, with the governance structure by having a system where the community's concerns and interests are represented on the board. The honourable member for Malvern has failed to read and understand the research, but it is clear, and there are numerous examples which show it, that aligning community participation and involvement with governance and management is consistent with delivering good health outcomes to the community.

After a wide consultation process, and I thank the honourable members opposite for at least acknowledging that the government had done that, the government has come up with a system that provides an opportunity for the community to be involved in the election of boards of governance, with some safeguards through some of the benefits that the government is happy to acknowledge have been experienced out of the appointment process. The government is not trying to do some sort of shandy, as has been suggested. It is trying to get the best out of both systems by aligning things in a way so that elections can be conducted. Having elections once every three years and using a proportional representation system to avoid interest group capture and the problem in country areas of having dominant towns taking control of the community centre will ensure that the election process will provide a reasonable spread of community views and opinions.

After the elections appointments can be made. As was mentioned by the honourable member for Rodney, in the odd circumstance that the board is completely turned over in an election there will be a further safeguard to ensure continuity. Although that would be extremely unlikely because of proportional representation, if it did occur it would be within the capacity of the minister through Governor in Council appointment to ensure some continuity; or, if the minister was concerned about a small amount of interest group capture, that again could be balanced. Further, there could be a means through the appointment process of widening the skill base of the board by adding someone with business practice and management skills. That would ensure that the community health centre had the means to deliver good health outcomes for the community when a gap occurred as a result of an election.

The bill is about delivering on the government's commitment. Unlike the honourable member for Malvern who wants a narrow definition of a policy commitment — in this circumstance, to suit him — the government's policy commitment was about restoring elected representatives, and that is what the bill does. It does so in such a way as to ensure that there are some safeguards in the process.

The honourable member for Malvern voiced grave concerns about the \$100 000 cost of democracy.

Mr Leigh — It is only money!

Mr VINEY — The honourable member for Mordialloc says it is only money. He forgets that the cost under the appointment process is \$139 000 per year, taking into account advertising and the time of people engaged in conducting the appointments and others involved in the process. The cost of the new system, both appointments and elections, is \$155 000 — an extra \$16 000 per year to cover both appointments and elections — which is not a lot to pay for the restoration of democracy to our community health centres.

The bill delivers a fundamental commitment of the government, which was to restore democracy to Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr WILSON (Bennettswood) — I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Health Services (Amendment) Bill. The government claims that it is fulfilling an election promise of restoring democracy to community health. The reality is that the bill is a compromise. It does not honour a Labor Party election promise. It falls far short of the election promise of 1999 and is another example of the Labor Party in government realising that the reforms of the previous Kennett government had great merit.

In 1997 the coalition government introduced legislation that was designed to modernise and improve the governance of community health centres across Victoria. In the second term of the Kennett government the then Minister for Health, the Honourable Rob Knowles, had a great desire to improve the status, quality and delivery of community health services throughout Victoria. He gave community health in Victoria a status that it had never enjoyed. The coalition government gave community health a much greater priority — it increased funding and ensured that it played a pivotal role in the delivery of health services in Victoria.

In 1997 the then shadow minister — the present minister — commenced his speech on the Health

Services (Community Health Centres) Bill with the words:

I will start off with my heading — ‘Outrage!’ — then move on to my subheadings ...

The bill removes ‘community’ from community health services and substitutes cronies stacked onto boards by the government to do the government’s bidding in community health matters.

The then shadow minister continued:

What does the legislation do? The first and most obvious thing it does is to abolish the election of members of community health centre boards and replace them with appointments by the Minister for Health.

If the honourable member for Albert Park was outraged in 1997, he must remain 50 per cent outraged in 2001. Why? Because his bill before the house is a two-bob-each-way piece of legislation — a bit of local elections and a bit of ministerial appointment.

In 1997 the honourable member for Albert Park was totally opposed to the government appointing, on the recommendation of local communities, talented and well-qualified people to serve on community health centre boards.

The current shadow Minister for Health, the honourable member for Malvern, during his contribution made the point that after the 1997 legislation was in place the then minister and government did not receive a flood of protests from local communities or local Labor members of Parliament complaining about the quality of community health centre board members.

The bill recognises that qualified and experienced people are needed on community health centre boards. That is why the government has not legislated for boards that are to be entirely elected by the local community. Indeed, I hope the current minister reflects upon the very bad old days of the Cain–Kirner administrations in the area of community health. We all remember the horror stories of community health centres out of control during the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

The government, indeed the minister, would be wise to ensure that community health centres do not become a political plaything of local Labor Party operators. If that becomes the case, local communities will suffer and the delivery of health services will diminish.

I conclude my comments by noting that my sources in the Department of Human Services, and they are many, are totally opposed to these changes and are fearful that

the bad old days of the 1980s and the early 1990s are about to be repeated.

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — In my previous life I was on a community health centre — —

Mr Leigh — And who sacked you?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! I think the honourable member for Mordialloc should hold his tongue.

Mr SEITZ — And having been removed as the whole committee by my colleagues at the time — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SEITZ — Yes, I still support the principle of community participation because you guys on that side in the Liberal Party have still not learnt that people want to be involved. They have to be allowed to make their own mistakes and choose their own destiny within their own communities.

You cannot have a dictatorship. That is why the Victorian public rejected the Liberal Party at the last election. The Liberal Party has been rejected right across Australia in recent elections, yet it still has not learned a lesson. It is not listening to the people. People running a school, a kindergarten or a child-care centre in a community should have the democratic right to appoint their own representatives and have them make their own mistakes without having autocratic dictatorship from the top down.

The bill has a number of safeguards that are needed in modern society. It has checks and balances, including the gaining of opinions from outgoing boards before people are appointed.

As is the case with neighbourhood houses, communities feel community health centres belong to them. The centres provide a service for each geographic area. They provide what people need and are not to be run as major business ventures. That is what opposition members have taken some time to learn. The longer it takes them to learn the longer Labor will stay in government, so I am quite happy for them to stay ignorant of the facts. I have heard a lot of claptrap about political ideology. The bill is not about that. I am one who is supporting the right for people in my community and right across the region to have the input they want.

A Liberal member said there was no outcry from the community. Most people were devastated, and everyone who received a government salary —

teachers, police and anybody else employed by the government — were gagged. They were not allowed to open their mouths by the former government. Under this government people are allowed to speak out and criticise. They are encouraged to express their views and demands on issues. The government will have the Victorian Electoral Commission conduct the election. Proper electoral rolls will be established and people will be entitled to vote. Local people will have input and will be able to look after the elderly, the young and the less fortunate people who cannot articulate their needs. They will be able to raise issues such as the cost of medicines going through the roof because Dr Wooldridge has taken them off the free list. There is no community advocacy at present, but formerly community health centres involved people in community health. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — The purpose of the bill is to amend the Health Services Act to provide for a shandy — and a shandy it is; it is neither one thing nor the other — of elected and appointed members of boards of community health centres.

In 1997 the Minister for Health while in opposition raised hell in my electorate when the Kennett government legislated for appointed boards of management. Subsequent events have demonstrated how mischievous his actions were and how unfounded were the fears he raised in my constituents — in the main, people in the older age group. Their concerns about health issues, especially as they affected their spouses and other loved ones, were very real, and were blatantly used and abused by Labor propagandists in 1997, particularly the then shadow minister, now the Minister for Health.

The Bellarine electorate has a very proud history of service and achievements in primary health care for its community health services, particularly the trailblazing Bellarine Peninsula Community Health Service, the first community health service in Australia. Despite Labor's scare tactics the service has thrived since 1997, as its annual reports attest. Today under the appointed board structure, the service enjoys unparalleled community support and involvement, particularly from its army of volunteers. In addition, currently it has a record membership of some 700 registered members. The bottom line is that the service has benefited from the arrangements introduced in 1997 because of its widened skills base and its blend of members. Currently the membership is split fifty-fifty male and female and fifty-fifty retired and working members.

It reflects great credit on the current board members. Recently I consulted with the president, Nan Lukey,

and the chief executive officer, Moyneen Curtis, about measures contained in the bill. I will attempt to raise with the government, and the minister in particular, a few of their concerns in the impossible 5 minutes that I have been allocated this evening due to the government's unrealistic debating timetable.

Above all, after the period of uncertainty that has existed during the long gestation period of this bill, the board and staff understandably want to see the new provisions bedded down and settled. They are very concerned about the time frame they have been given, and are anxious about complying with those times.

They are concerned about the mechanics of the government's hybrid model of boards of management. The Bellarine Peninsula Community Health Service originally favoured a hybrid model itself, but it decided, finally, that it was not practical and opted for a fully elected board again. After 1997 it did find some advantages in having appointed health boards. In particular it liked the change of culture from a committee of management to a board of management and the chance to focus on governance issues instead of the minutiae. I hope that culture continues.

The health service made several points in its consultation process, and the board and staff have asked me to bring them to the attention of the house and the minister tonight. Firstly, they ask, 'How does the community regard someone who misses out at election and is subsequently appointed? Does this mean the community does not want me? So how do I stand for board membership? Do I go for election or do I go for appointment?'. That is a very valid point and it needs to be considered.

Secondly, the health service would prefer rolling annual appointments for the stability and continuity it will give a board of management and a community health service, rather than what is proposed — a total wipe-out every three years and then re-elections.

Thirdly, the health service hopes the advertisement for elections and appointments can be done together, but it is concerned that the people who nominate in February will not know until July what their fate is in terms of their applications to the board, and that is far too long to wait.

Finally, the board of management warns that unless the government sorts itself out and gets board of management advertisements out into the press by 1 April the results will be a complete stuff-up.

The health service offers people on the Bellarine Peninsula an exemplary service, and that is what it is all

about, surely. I hope Labor's philosophical meddling does not threaten the Bellarine Peninsula Community Health Service's enviable reputation.

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) — I have much pleasure in supporting the Health Services (Amendment) Bill. A number of honourable members opposite have had difficulty indicating what position they will take when the house comes to vote on the passage of the bill. I listened carefully to the contribution from the honourable member for Malvern, the shadow Minister for Health, and at no stage could I perceive that he had either an understanding of or a commitment to community health services.

One could understand when he was in government that he would be gung-ho in favour of the government being able to appoint its own people directly to any board; in fact one can imagine that any government likes to be able to directly make appointments. Therefore, you would think he would have some interest in a proposal from this government to forgo that opportunity to allow elections of independent people to take place.

That is where the shadow minister's real agenda lies. He has no commitment to community health centres. One thing that elections will bring is independent advocates who can only be removed for very gross matters such as criminal convictions or when facing police investigations, but who are far less likely to be removed by a government of the day simply for being independent and vocal.

I suspect the agenda the honourable member for Malvern is running is that he does not want independent members of the community advocating for public health services, and that is one reason why I support the bill. The attitudes of a number of members of the Kennett government eventually caught up with them in September 1999. When the former government made its cutbacks the first people it cut from human services were the advocates or the various elected community groups that had full-time workers with staff. The Kennett government understood that the removal of the advocates would make it easier for it to cut services.

I was appalled to hear the honourable member for Malvern say that there will be no elected boards in public hospitals or health services. He does not understand the difference between a large public hospital and a community health centre. As somebody who has worked in the industrial health industry and also sat on a public hospital board, I can tell the honourable member that there is a big difference. By their nature, public hospitals unfortunately must put most of their resources and energy into the treatment of

people with acute health conditions. Community health centres have a greater opportunity to tackle prevention and education and to provide a range of other programs, such as food cooperatives.

I support the bill because it empowers the community by electing independent people who will be advocates for strong community health being provided in public settings. The honourable member for Malvern tried to play semantics with the consultation process and what percentage of submissions favoured health boards. At the end of the day, 76 per cent of submissions to the inquiry supported either partially or totally elected health boards for community health centres.

The circulated amendments specify that the Victorian Electoral Commission will ensure the integrity of the electoral system, despite the fears expressed by the honourable member for Malvern. I look forward to the passage of the bill through this place and the other place, its implementation and the restoration of democratically elected boards.

Ms McCALL (Frankston) — My contribution to debate on the Health Services (Amendment) Bill will be brief so as to give as many members as possible the opportunity to contribute. I do not oppose in principle what is being achieved by the government, but I shall put in perspective what the opposition believes to be the role of community health centres.

As is the honourable member for Frankston East, I am well aware of the excellent contributions made by the community health centre in my electorate. However, as with any service provider, the community has a right to expect that those who are responsible for providing services are the most appropriate, skilled and qualified people. In some cases they may not be the people who live on the doorstep of a community health centre. That should be and is the basis of the merit principle of appointment. If people are to be appointed to boards, the government must ensure that the principle by which appointments and elections are made are as broadly based as possible.

The bill provides that a person's name must be on the electoral roll before being eligible to apply. I have a problem with that given that in 1995, when the review that led to the previous government's review of community health centres was completed, fewer than 1800 people on the Victorian electoral roll were eligible to vote for the right to sit on the boards of community health centres. In anybody's mind that could not be described as a broad section of the entire Victorian community. I understand one health centre board had

only 11 people eligible to vote. Such a low number cannot possibly represent a reasonable cross-section.

A health centre board is no different from the governing body of any other community service, whether a kindergarten, a preschool, or any one of a large range of other community services. I, like the honourable member for Preston, have served on a hospital board and am well aware of the differences between services provided by a community health centre and those provided by a hospital.

We have a responsibility to the community to ensure that elected representatives as well as appointees to boards of community health centres be people with the best skills available. Happening to live just around the corner is not a skill, and having been a client is not necessarily a skill either. Indeed, sometimes the clients of a community health centre are the least advantaged people in the community. I do not suggest that people who are disadvantaged are automatically less skilled. There is an assumption, however, that clients of community health centres may not be the most skilled people available.

The government's compromise position — as characterised by the honourable member for Bennettswood — in relation to its policy statement of 1999 is a fifty-fifty deal and probably the best we can expect from a part-time minister. I want an assurance that the people who work on community health centre boards will be the most appropriate, most skilled, most capable and most committed for the role. I urge the government to ensure that appointees are selected not for cheap political shots or for political payback but purely on merit. That is a principle that the women members of this chamber take very seriously. People should be appointed for the right reasons.

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — The Health Services (Amendment) Bill simply provides for the election of four or five members of boards and the appointment of another two to four members.

There are a couple of differences between the way it is now and the way it will be in the future. Neither arrangement is perfect, but the change is one the Labor Party has been very keen to implement.

I was involved in one of the regional forums run by the Lakes Entrance Community Health Centre. A number of issues were raised at those forums, some of which I will address later. I wish to say at the start, however, that the problem with appointments to board positions is that they can be made as a result of political influence. Appointments made in that way are always a

matter of concern no matter which party is in power. When such things happen community members can quite rightly form the view that they do not have adequate input into the make-up of the board. I understand where the Labor Party is coming from on that one.

The practice of electing members by vote can present problems, too. An election in a country area, particularly one that has a large town surrounded by a low population scattered thinly over a large area — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! We can do without the conversation across the chamber.

Mr INGRAM — The outlying regions may not have adequate representation on the boards of community health centres, which may mean that the service requirements of the centre may be directed more to the towns rather than surrounding regions. The role of community health centres is to deliver services where they are needed.

My electorate is blessed with good community health centres, and I recognise the dedicated work of the people involved in the boards, the chief executive officers and the staff who work in the centres. With people exercising their democratic right to vote we may end up with the squeaky wheel syndrome — the more organised groups, particularly those in the towns such as retirees, may end up with a disproportionate number of members on the board and the services provided by the centres may end up going to those sectors, which may not necessarily be the area of greatest need.

Some health centres boundaries are unclear. The Lakes Entrance Community Health Centre delivers services predominantly to Lakes Entrance and the surrounding community, but it overrides areas such as Nowa Nowa and, in fact, partly manages the Nowa Nowa and Ensay community health centres. Services such as Meals on Wheels and aged care are important services delivered to surrounding communities.

The Lakes Entrance Community Health Centre delivers services to Bairnsdale, which is also covered by the Bairnsdale hospital. In some cases people may be eligible to vote for election to two boards or to be appointed to two boards because of the overlapping of services.

During the consultation process I attended a forum at Lakes Entrance, and only a small number of people were in attendance. Apparently 113 written

submissions were received. I would like to know what percentage of the submissions came from rural areas and whether the majority of the submissions were received from city-based community health centres. The majority of people at the Lakes Entrance forum that I attended indicated they were comfortable with the service delivery of community health centres. They thought there could be some problems with the voting system. The honourable member for Bellarine raised an interesting point when he inquired whether a person should stand for an elected or appointed position.

Small community health centres such as Nowa Nowa and Ensay have problems filling their board positions. They do not have large communities, and although the service delivery is good and is supported by some of the larger service centres, they still have trouble getting sufficient board members, so implementing a voting structure may not necessarily be the best thing for those communities. Members of boards will have to travel long distances to attend board or committee meetings, which may mean significant costs.

I refer to some of the comments raised at the meeting I attended in Lakes Entrance. It was said that the boards value community representation and participation, and during this process the value of the service has not been completely recognised. Many dedicated people have put in considerable time and energy to ensure the delivery of community health services is maintained at the highest level.

Some of those hardworking members may decide that if their commitment and dedication to the board is not recognised they will not stand again. That would be a shame because the expertise in managing and looking after the facilities would be lost. Another comment was that this is just another change with little acknowledgment of the work done to date.

The comment was also made that the new facility would be unnecessarily complex, particularly for extremely small agencies. Concern was expressed about the three-year changeover of board members and the implications of a spill of positions on the board, particularly as the chief executive officer would have to re-educate the new appointments and the management of that responsibility would be a problem.

Comments also highlighted the potential for some people to run as single-issue candidates, or to get a band of people together to run on an issue. Such members might not fairly represent broad concerns or the required service mix. Proportional representation in the voting structure should cover that danger, but it was certainly one of the concerns raised.

As I said earlier, comment was made on the potential to lose corporate memory, and little opportunity is available for the succession of board members.

Another general issue, important to raise in debate, is the high unit cost for service delivery in country areas. Currently, the formula increases the funding to rural community health centres — the relative resource equity formula has a rural weighting. While the weighting gives extra resources to rural areas it is based on output funding. If the levels of service are increased, the level of debt of the facility is increased — for example, in East Gippsland, because of the distance involved and the current high cost of fuel and transport in delivering services for the aged, there is about a \$5 an hour loss to the Lakes Entrance Community Health Centre. If services delivered by the government are increased, the total amount of loss increases. The number of units provided are increased, but that simply worsens the problem for the centre.

I also raise the extreme costs for centres in far East Gippsland which have large distances between them. Lakes Entrance Community Health Centre delivers services to Ensay, Swifts Creek and Nowa Nowa, and the cost in delivering services to those areas is not often recognised. Additional pressure is put on for the delivery of Meals on Wheels. If they are delivered to, say, Swifts Creek, they have to be chilled and the centre has difficulty meeting the required health standards. That places additional pressure and imposes increased costs on community health centres.

I understand the reasons the government introduced the bill and the basic principle of including the election of members. Having half the board members appointed and half elected may be a reasonable balance.

All systems have problems, but my job is to represent the concerns of the community and the community health centres in my area, which I have done. At the meetings I attended there was not overwhelming support for a change, but a number of issues were raised that need addressing. This debate has provided me with the opportunity to refer to those issues, some of which I hope will be addressed by the minister.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — I am outraged — I am taking my cue from the 1997 speech of the honourable member for Albert Park, now the Minister for Health — because the bill does not provide for the model I prefer, which is the fully elected model. However, I am not so outraged that I will not support the bill, because it is a very good bill. The philosophy and ideology behind the bill is that of democracy,

which is extremely important for community health centres in particular.

Community health centres are about local communities. They are based in local communities and they do a lot of excellent work with health promotion through their dealings with young people, young mothers and a whole range of people at a local level.

Why shouldn't local people be involved in organising and administering those services at a board level? Board members should be locals who understand their communities and are able to put programs in place to look after them.

The expert model does not work. An example of an expert board that does not work is Isis Primary Care. I did not come in here a couple of years ago and slam that service for being hopeless, especially in my community in Deer Park, because I did not want to denigrate the good work that many of the people at Isis Primary Care were doing. However, the appointed board was ripping services and doctors out of the Deer Park campus, and the residents went out on the streets and protested because the system was crook. The honourable member for Malvern understood the anger that the Deer Park residents felt a couple of years ago when that service was being attacked in that way.

The consultation process that preceded the bill was a good process. Unfortunately, honourable members on the other side of the house do not understand that process. I invite any Liberal or National Party member in the house who went to one of those consultation sessions to raise his or her hand. Not even one!

I attended one of the sessions, as did the honourable member for Gippsland East. Overall the community believed that there should be a balance of members on the boards, but they wanted their local people back — not the experts. Seventy-six per cent of people who attended those sessions wanted local representation back. I am not scared of my local people being on boards.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! I remind honourable members that they should not walk between the Speaker and the member speaking.

Mr NARDELLA — Honourable members should not be afraid of having members of their local communities on the boards of their community health centres. They should look for people with the necessary skills — or better still, train some local community members, because they are not dumbos. You do not need a degree to get on a board and run a community health centre. People can be trained in those skills.

That is one of the beautiful things that happened at the Melton Community Health Centre. We trained ordinary people — people like me, for instance — who then went out and looked after their community. We were innovative and expanded our services from Melton into Bacchus Marsh and the surrounding region. That did not result from a directive by experts but from a directive by people on the ground — ordinary mums and dads — who had the will and commitment to the local community to expand the community health centre services within that region.

It morphed into Djerriwarrh Health Services. They were community decisions; they were elected positions. We had to go out and find members to put on the roll. There is a disincentive, in that you have to reapply every year and go out and get members. There were 1800 members in 1995, but there are a lot fewer than that now. Chief executive officers and board members will be charged with the responsibility of going out, getting people interested in their community health centres and getting them to become members and actively participate in their community.

That is what it is about: community health is about the community. It is not about doctors or nurses or the other experts people want to appoint to boards. It is about the community and about ensuring people's participatory rights are upheld, such as their right not to be sacked because they make a decision that goes against the wishes of the government of the day, regardless of who it is. That is why the members are being put there independently.

There were some terrific members on the Melton Community Health Centre board. They did lots of great things for the community — and many of them are still there. I support the bill.

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — The honourable member for Melton speaks with passion about community health centres. It is good to hear someone who is as keen on these centres as he is. In many cases these bodies provide a valuable service to their communities.

It is important to note that the legislation changes the composition of the boards running these centres. I am concerned that the change will be detrimental. When in the past the boards did an effective job they did so principally because their members were appointed on the basis of their skills and their willingness to contribute to their community health centres. As the honourable member for Melton will realise, the change will mean that anyone who puts his or her name up can become a member and be entitled to vote. The bill is

supposed to be about community health centres, but it is not about communities voting, because only those people who put their names forward can vote. People will put their names forward to be part of the system for all sorts of reasons, and they will get the vote. I have never seen a system that is more likely to be stacked than this. People who want to be on the boards need only get sufficient members to put their names forward and vote them on.

It is interesting to note that members opposite consider this to be a bit of a joke. Obviously they are used to it. It is the most detrimental part of the proposed system, which is a pity, because like the honourable member for Melton I respect the job the community health centres do.

It is also interesting to talk to some of the people on the existing boards, who are confused about how the election process and appointment system will work. It is always a pity when a group of people who are dedicated to doing a job are turfed out on a political whim. On that basis, the bill is a pity.

The boards will become boards of governance rather than boards of management. That in turn will place more power into the hands of the chief executive officer (CEO). In many cases that is a plus. However, for a board to be effective its members must know the nuts and bolts of how the organisation runs. If it is purely a board of governance rather than a board of management, greater control can be given to the CEO, which may lessen the community input.

As I said, the election process is a farce because it will not be an election at all. Earlier the point was made by way of interjection that the cost of the system will be \$100 000 a year. One must ask: for what? Why does a system where part of the board is elected and part is appointed have to be that much better at a cost of \$300 000 over the three-year term of the appointment? The opposition finds that cost hard to justify in real terms. The money would be better spent on the ground or on programs the boards are keen to promote.

The mismatch of representation will require a real need for local training of board members on their appointment. That will be a plus if it happens, because new members will gain a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. If it does not happen the government should be condemned for not doing justice to the introduction of a new system.

I commend the Upper Hume Community Health Service, with which I am intimately involved. The area

it covers extends as far as Mount Beauty, Corryong, Walwa and Beechworth. It has done an excellent job.

Mr Paterson interjected.

Mr PLOWMAN — It runs down to Benalla and Wangaratta. It represents a large area. The health service has been instrumental in organising an across-border drug forum on Friday next that will be advantageous for the cities of Albury and Wodonga. It is an example of how efficient such organisations can be. I commend the Upper Hume Community Health Service for doing its job well since the appointment of its members.

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — I have pleasure in adding my voice to the support for the Health Services (Amendment) Bill. The Banyule Community Health Centre in the heart of the Melbourne Olympic Village is in my electorate.

During the debate I have realised that the opposition still does not understand the word 'consultation'. When one consults one is meant to listen, obtain feedback and act upon it. When the government consulted with the community it listened to the people and acted upon the advice it received during public meetings. I attended a meeting at Northcote where the people wanted a combination of both appointed and elected board members in their area.

When in government the opposition did not consult; it just rammed everything through. For example, without consulting the electorate or the boards, in 1997 it put through a bill and dissolved them all. I was a member of local government in 1994 when the former government did exactly the same thing. It did not consult and pushed a motion through this house to sack us all.

Opposition members have learned nothing from that process, because they are again criticising government members about consultation. We consulted with the public, and we have learned from it. The public wants a combined board of members appointed by the minister and members duly elected, so we are going ahead with that. The opposition cannot understand what the consultation process is all about, which is that you are meant to listen and not just do what you wanted to do in the first place.

Time and again government members have been told that the new system will cost more. As the honourable member for Frankston East, Parliamentary Secretary for Human Services, pointed out — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LANGDON — And a very good parliamentary secretary. Time and again we have been told that it will cost \$16 000 more for democracy — or part democracy, if you like — than for the current system. That is far too inexpensive for the opposition; it obviously believes democracy should be far more expensive than that! It clearly does not like consultation and democracy, especially when they come cheaply, because it also constantly criticises the government for opening up the process.

In 1997 the honourable member for Malvern, who is now the shadow Minister for Health, said that I should keep an eye on what the Kennett government did with the then West Heidelberg Community Health Centre. I will give credit where credit is due. The Kennett government did a reasonable job with the Banyule Community Health Centre. In that case it listened, unlike the situation with the Austin Hospital, when it would not listen. That lost it the seat of Ivanhoe and ended up giving me a greater majority.

The opposition should learn to listen a bit better. If it had listened, perhaps it would still be on this side of the house.

Mr PATERSON (South Barwon) — In the 2 minutes left to me it will be a pleasure to contribute to the debate! The Liberal Party has a fine record in community health, and the changes made by the previous government were designed to and did strengthen the community health service network.

In my electorate significant advances were made in the area of community health. The previous coalition government created a new community health centre in Torquay, in the Quiksilver building on the Surf Coast Highway, which has been well received by the people of Torquay, Jan Juc and surrounding areas. The previous government also committed itself to building a brand new community health centre in Belmont. It is pleasing to see the new government continuing with the commitment to build the Belmont Community Health Centre.

The bill will probably end up being a complete waste of time and money. Health centres are operating well under the current system. As we discovered under the old system, many elected boards had to be thrown out because they were in trouble, including one in my electorate. In fact, the Surf Coast Community Health Centre board had to request the minister to sack it because there was so much trouble.

As we know, the Torquay Community Health Centre is part of Barwon Health. Although it seems obsessed

with returning to elected boards, curiously this government will leave the Torquay health centre with Barwon Health, which of course is controlled by an appointed board. The current government is clearly confused about what it wants to do.

As I said, many elected boards have got themselves into serious trouble. I am sure that all honourable members hope that does not happen again. However, I am not particularly confident about the proposed model.

Under the new arrangements now in place a return to elections is not widely supported in the community health centre network, because centres are operating exceptionally well under the current format.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! Pursuant to sessional orders the time has come to interrupt government business for the adjournment of the house.

Glenvale Road, Ringwood North: safety audit

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — I direct a matter to the attention of the Minister for Transport. I hope he comes into the chamber to answer my query. Glenvale Road, which is a very busy private road in my electorate, is on the boundary of the Manningham and Maroondah council areas. The road has become a major death trap.

In recent years a number of new housing estates have been built and residents use Glenvale Road as a main thoroughfare to get to shops and local schools, and to travel to and from work. However, little attention has been paid to the state of the road. There is no guttering and there are many dangerous intersections at high and low points in the road. The road stretches for some 5 or 6 kilometres and is like a big dipper in many parts. I understand that under the black spot road funding program the Minister for Transport has some \$240 million available, for which he claims credit. I would like some of that money to go to Liberal-held seats instead of to seats held by Independent and Labor members.

An objective procedure is in place called the Road Safety Council, which is chaired by an independent chairman — Mal Sandon. Mr Sandon is well known to honourable members on both sides of the chamber. As part of his deliberations I hope the chairman will ensure that the road safety audit, which this supposedly

independent Road Safety Council has requested to be undertaken of local residents, will be done on an independent basis. I understand representatives from the two municipalities involved are required, and certainly the Manningham and Maroondah municipalities are more than willing to assist. I call on the minister to inspect that road.

Rural Victoria: sewerage

Mr STEGGALL (Swan Hill) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Environment and Conservation the sewerage rebate to small towns. The minister is renegeing on a promise made to country people at the last election. I am aware of at least 15 householders — throughout Victoria there are probably 100 — who are affected by the issue. As an election promise the government said that no-one would have to pay more than \$800 for sewerage in small towns. Refunds were to be made to the people who had already paid, and in general that happened.

However, some families sold their properties, and in the township of Koondrook the new owners received refunds of approximately \$1700 each, even though the vendors had to pay the outstanding sewerage charge at the time of settlement. The minister and I have received two letters on this issue. The minister stated that under the Water Act when a property changes ownership the new owner becomes liable for any new charges. The sewerage charges were not new charges on the properties; they were old charges that were settled when settlement occurred at the point of transfer.

The minister argues that if the new owner is liable for any new charges he or she is therefore entitled to any refund. However, these are not charges because they have been settled. The minister cites section 272(1) of the Water Act as the authority for paying the refund to the new owners. That section applies to moneys collected for a sewerage scheme. The minister claims the act directs the authority to refund any excess collected to the current property owners. The act makes no mention of current property owners but refers simply to 'the owners'.

Surely the rules of natural justice would require the authority to refund moneys to the people who paid the original charge — in these cases, the previous owners. I make the further point that this was a deliberate political refund made by the government, not an excess collected from householders, so it cannot be used as a parallel situation under the act.

There will be many such cases throughout Victoria, and I ask the minister to reconsider her decision because it

is wrong. At the last election she promised that no-one would pay more than \$800. Unless the minister rectifies the situation she will have misled the electorate.

Ethnic communities: refugee support

Mr HOLDING (Springvale) — I direct the urgent attention of the Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs to the problems being faced by Victorian migrant communities that are being forced to provide support to holders of temporary protection visas.

By way of background, honourable members would be aware that the commonwealth has acknowledged it has a responsibility to help holders of temporary protection visas as it has acknowledged their refugee status under the refugee convention and has therefore acknowledged their legal claim to refugee status. However, at the same time as it has acknowledged this claim, it has set about demonising — —

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I seek the advice of the Chair on this issue. I understand the adjournment debate is an opportunity for honourable members to ask ministers to take administrative action on issues relevant to their portfolios. The honourable member is discussing an issue relating to migration and to immigration status that is clearly in the jurisdiction of the federal Parliament and not the Victorian Parliament. I ask you to direct him to a relevant issue.

Ms Kosky — On the point of order, in fairness to the honourable member for Springvale he had hardly started to speak before the honourable member for Monbulk jumped to his feet. Maybe we should give the honourable member the opportunity to finish what he has to say before jumping to conclusions.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! I accept the point of order raised by the honourable member for Monbulk, but equally I think the minister is correct. I do not think we have heard sufficient to gauge whether the honourable member for Springvale intends to ask for action from the minister, but if he does not I will certainly pull him up.

Mr HOLDING — I can understand the opposition's sensitivity on the issue. The action I seek is that the minister ensure that adequate regimes of support exist to make sure temporary protection visa holders are not deprived of their basic rights as residents in the Victorian community.

In July 2000 the commonwealth said there would be 250 temporary protection visa holders in Victoria. We

now have more than 560. One hundred of the temporary protection visa holders are under the age of 18, and 27 are unattached minors. These people have often been released with less than 24 hours notice, making support — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member needs to advise the Chair what action he is requesting the minister to take.

Mr HOLDING — I have specifically said that the action I am seeking is that the minister indicate what level of support can be provided to the community for temporary protection visa holders.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Australian Formula One Grand Prix

Mr WILSON (Bennettswood) — I ask the Minister for Health to seek an assurance from his department that the perceived health problems associated with the grand prix that have previously been raised in this house have been adequately addressed.

As we approach this weekend's grand prix I reflect on one of the more bizarre speeches delivered in this house on the issue of the grand prix at Albert Park. In 1994 an honourable member called on the then Minister for Health, Marie Tehan, to conduct an inquiry into the detrimental effects of the grand prix at Albert Park. The same honourable member demanded a guarantee from the then minister that the health of local residents would not be detrimentally affected by the grand prix. The honourable member advised the house of the apolitical opposition by doctors to the grand prix at Albert Park. The honourable member warned of traffic accident casualties as a consequence of the grand prix and lamented the hoon effect — —

Mr Haermeyer — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, as the honourable member for Monbulk pointed out in his point of order, the adjournment debate is an opportunity for honourable members to seek action from ministers relative to their portfolios, and also generally matters that are relevant to their electorate. I am unaware at this time what administrative action the honourable member is requiring.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! I have heard enough on the point of order.

Mr WILSON — The honourable member in question was and is the member for Albert Park and has now been the Minister for Health for 16 months. I am

interested to know about the progress of his inquiry into the detrimental health effects on his constituents in Albert Park. Honourable members know that his opposition to the grand prix has conveniently evaporated and has been replaced with support for one of Australia's great sporting events. Somehow I suspect that the grand prix public health inquiry has suffered the same fate as the much promised inquiry into Crown Casino.

I ask the minister to seek an assurance from his department that all the concerns he detailed in 1994 have been addressed. Or, as I suspect, was the honourable member in 1994 simply playing politics with the grand prix, one of the greatest achievements of the previous coalition government?

CFA: volunteers

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I stand tonight to speak on the issue of the Country Fire Authority, and before any honourable members interject to ask what my question is, it is about what action the Minister for Police and Emergency Services will be taking with regard to CFA volunteers.

This year is the International Year of Volunteers and I have the flag for volunteering attached to my shirt. The CFA is made up of volunteers from across the state: I am a member and am very proud of my role as one. Thousands of Victorian volunteers work for a whole range of organisations, but those in the CFA put themselves out in a significant way to help their communities.

For example, in my brigade not only do members take the fire truck out on a Sunday for a spin, to train and work on the truck itself but they also do a tremendous amount of work during the week. Many volunteer firefighters carry pagers around so that no matter where they are, no matter what family functions they go to or what other personal activities they are involved in, they are ready to go. They put their heart and soul into their work for the brigade.

CFA members today also have to fundraise for their brigades. It is a tremendous benefit that the government has increased funding to the CFA — —

Opposition members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The opposition benches!

Mr MAXFIELD — However, a great deal of fundraising is still required to help Victorian brigades. My brigade has had to fundraise to help provide a new

shed, a new support vehicle and things like pagers for brigade members. At the Jindivick flower show on Sunday the local CFA was fundraising by raffling firewood —

An Opposition Member — Do you want us to buy a raffle ticket?

Mr MAXFIELD — If you want to come and buy a raffle ticket I will happily sell you one to support our brigade.

I am looking to the government for ongoing support of state volunteers. The government regards highly the support of CFA volunteers who get called out in the middle of the night and place their lives at risk. Their families also make tremendous sacrifices, because their loved ones are away from their homes and families when fighting fires both day and night.

The CFA is without a doubt one of the finest organisations in Victoria, and I am proud to say that I belong to it.

Marine pests and diseases

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I draw to the attention of the Minister for Environment and Conservation the introduction of potential marine pests and diseases into the state.

On 26 February the *Bairnsdale Advertiser* contained an article and a photograph about the introduction of ornamental seastars into the state. The gentleman decided to put the seastars in a saltwater pool. They appeared to come alive but as it turned out that was not the case; they were only rehydrated.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order The honourable member for Gippsland East, uninterrupted.

Mr INGRAM — I ask the minister to do all in her power to ensure the protection of our marine environments for the fishing and aquaculture industries that depend on them. I ask her to write to her federal counterpart to ensure that we are given adequate protection from our quarantine service to ensure that seastars and other potential pests and animals do not come in from overseas.

The seastars came from the Philippines. They were sun-dried and brought in as ornamental devices. Honourable members are obviously aware that many pests and diseases have been introduced from overseas.

I refer honourable members to the issue of fire blight in apples, about which debate is currently occurring.

I ask the minister to recognise the importance of the fishing industry. Although the seastars might not have come back to life, diseases on them could have wiped out our own starfish, which could in turn upset the balance of nature and impact on industries such as the southern rock lobster industry, the abalone industry, the recreational fishing industry or the important aquaculture industries that we are developing. As honourable members know, the aquaculture industry is worth \$200 million a year to this country just in beach prices. The industry is extremely important to our country.

We should also take as much notice of the agricultural industries as we do of the industries in the marine environments. I ask the minister to do all she can to protect the marine environments from introduced pests and diseases.

School buses: satellite phones

Mr VOGELS (Warrnambool) — I raise with the Minister for Education a problem with satellite phones. Is it true that the Department of Education, Employment and Training supplied all school buses with satellite phones? Is it also true the phones have to be hand held? It appears that they are not in a kit, which means that school bus drivers have to stop their buses to use them because it is illegal to use a hand-held phone in a moving vehicle. Because there is no antenna drivers cannot take incoming calls. No charger is supplied, which means that as the battery lasts for only 3 hours, the bus driver has to take the phone home for recharging. Under occupational health and safety regulations the phone should be firmly held in a kit because it is illegal to have a loose object on the dashboard.

I ask the Minister for Education to ensure that this worthwhile initiative to help school bus operators and parents keep in contact in rural and remote Victoria is sorted out as soon as possible.

VET in Schools program

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I ask the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment what steps she is taking to provide full and effective access to suitable facilities for students who wish to participate in the VET (vocational education and training) in Schools program.

It is a vital education program in regional areas such as the electorate of Geelong for two reasons: because of

the high level of unemployment in regional areas and the need to ensure increased retention rates in secondary colleges.

Access to the program is therefore of importance to students and their parents. From my communications with secondary colleges in the Geelong region I have learnt that VET programs have been a resounding success.

Schools are experiencing a large demand for VET programs, to the point where they are battling to provide effective courses for many students. The programs are in demand because students and their parents realise that to gain full-time or some form of employment in regional areas there is a need for permanent-type programs and pathways.

There is a significant and growing demand for VET programs in schools. I seek an explanation from the minister as to the steps she can take to ensure that students have full access to those programs. It is a vital issue to regional areas, and indeed to Geelong, and I look forward to the minister's response.

GST: stamp duty

Mr SMITH (Glen Waverley) — I refer the Treasurer to concerns expressed in a letter from a constituent, Brigadier E. J. Compton, about the imposition of stamp duty on an amount already subject to the required GST impost.

Before I go into detail, I remind the house that Access Economics has already said that the windfall from this is worth some \$130 million to Victoria alone. The minister should take this matter on board because it is a big issue out in the suburbs and is causing a lot of consternation for ordinary people.

Brigadier Compton has attached to the letter a copy of the portion of his home contents insurance policy with Catholic Church Insurances Ltd. He has done his sums to prove indisputably that the GST on the premium is a tax on a tax.

Interestingly, an inquiry to his insurance company elicited the information that it had no choice in the matter. His letter states:

Then, on two different occasions —

the Treasurer should listen to this very carefully —

I telephoned the state stamp duties office to seek an explanation. The second occasion, some time later, was to confirm what I had been told the first time. In essence, I was informed in both conversations that they had received many calls about this very matter but they could do nothing about it,

that it was something that was 'missed' in the state legislation when the GST came into effect.

He goes on to say:

One wonders how many other matters have been 'missed' by the government and the public are paying the price of the oversight by being taxed on taxes already paid elsewhere. One also wonders whether other states have committed this error or whether the Victorian Treasury has singularly distinguished itself.

Mr Haermeyer — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I do not wish to take up too much of the honourable member's time, but I ask that he table the document from which he is quoting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! Is the honourable member for Glen Waverley happy to table the document?

Mr SMITH — What a time waster! I have already indicated that it is a letter from Brigadier E. J. Compton, which I will make available to the Treasurer.

The letter continues:

I am sure many citizens of Victoria would appreciate an immediate correction to this questionable taxing practice or receive at least a plausible explanation. Perhaps you could enquire on behalf of all the citizenry, for of course I am unaware whether the matter has been raised before.

This is a matter that is taking off in the suburbs, and I am sure the suburban newspapers are extremely interested in it. I call on the minister to give this windfall tax back to the people so that they get the benefit of it. At one stage he promised that he would do that, but of course nothing has happened and the state Treasury is gaining a windfall that it does not deserve.

Housing: recreational programs

Ms BEATTIE (Tullamarine) — I ask the Minister for Housing to advise the house of the recreational programs that will operate in public housing estates and of the remedies they might hold for difficult social problems.

In early January, when most people were on holidays, the minister and I went to a public housing estate in Westmeadows for the launch of a recreational program for young people who lived in an estate called the Mews. The program was launched by the minister together with players from the Melbourne Tigers basketball team. I confess that I am not really a basketball fan, but I could not help but be impressed by — —

An honourable member interjected.

Ms BEATTIE — And I confess I am a Collingwood supporter, so there is the double whammy!

An honourable member interjected.

Ms BEATTIE — I am standing. At that launch I was inspired by the way that young people related to these basketballers. It was heartening that at a local community level the service agencies and state and local government had combined to develop a practical outreach program for young people in an area where they can be left idle and all too often find themselves in difficult situations.

None of that was evident at this launch because these young people came together as a community, drawn in by all those agencies, and played basketball with the Melbourne Tigers, and they really reached out to each other. So often public housing is an area where young people are left to their own devices and get into mischief because there are no organised programs for them. This is an extension of what the Bracks Labor government wants to do with public housing. It does not want just to build houses. It wants to build communities. That is the hallmark of the Bracks Labor government. It is not just building houses and forgetting about people, it is building communities — unlike the Kennett government, which tried to smash communities open, tear people apart and leave them without hope.

I ask the minister what recreational programs may operate and what remedies those programs may hold for people who have difficulties and are facing social problems.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms BEATTIE — I love speaking after dinner. Sometimes it is very active!

McCrae Yacht Club

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — I ask the Minister for Environment and Conservation to facilitate through Parks Victoria a lease for the McCrae Yacht Club.

McCrae Yacht Club is one of the premier yacht clubs in Victoria. It has been there a long time. It is a vibrant club with a lot of members. It has hosted international, national and state championships over a number of years and was very involved in the 1999 world championships and the last two Sail Melbourne regattas. It has encouraged many young people to take up sailing. It is a great family club that is very much

into training young people and anyone else interested in sailing, which is a great sport.

Its premises are on the Rosebud foreshore, which is administered by Parks Victoria. The clubrooms are maintained in excellent condition. As I said, it is a vibrant yacht club. Unfortunately the lease expired 12 months ago. All that was required of the yacht club by Parks Victoria and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment was fulfilled by the yacht club. It did everything required of it in terms of setting up the new 21-year lease.

Even though the club has been promised a lease arrangement, 12 months has gone by and it has no lease. You can imagine the uncertainty that brings to a vibrant club like that. The members are quite concerned about this delay and are now wondering what the future will be and whether there is some hidden agenda regarding the future of their club, which I think is a fair question.

As I said, the club has done everything required of it, and the uncertainty is not helping with its future plans. The certainty that a 21-year lease would give the club would enable it to move into the future. I ask the minister to finally make a decision to give some certainty to the club regarding its lease.

Chisholm Institute

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — I ask the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment to outline what action she intends to take with regard to Chisholm TAFE. As honourable members would know it provides education and training to some 57 000 students in the south-east suburbs of Melbourne, the Mornington Peninsula and Western Port.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member's time has expired. I call the honourable member for Monbulk.

Mr McArthur — Mr Acting Speaker, I raise a point of order about the matter raised by the honourable member for Springvale earlier. I did not raise it until the end of the time allotted for honourable members to raise issues so as not to deprive them of time. However, I ask you to consider whether his issue was within the jurisdiction of the minister to whom it was referred.

When he first introduced the issue, the honourable member addressed it to the Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs, then proceeded to discuss issues related to migration, refugee status and a range of issues that were clearly within the federal jurisdiction.

I put it to you that you should rule this matter completely out of order and not refer it to the minister nominated for a range of reasons. First I refer you to page 12 of *Rulings from the Chair 1920–2000*, which states that the matter raised must:

... relate directly to the responsibility of a state minister, not the object of a state minister referring to a federal minister.

That ruling was given by Speaker Plowman in 1980 and was reinforced by Speaker Delzoppo in 1993. It reinforces the guidelines available for all honourable members on conducting adjournment debates. Clearly the honourable member for Springvale has neglected to consult those guidelines in considering the issue he raised today.

I put it to you, Mr Acting Speaker, that not only did he raise a matter that is clearly within the jurisdiction of a federal minister but that in so doing he failed to ask for any action within the state minister's jurisdiction or administrative ambit. I suggest that in accordance with the traditions and rulings of the house and the rulings of previous Speakers the matter he raised should be ruled out of order and should not be referred to the minister nominated.

Mr Pandazopoulos — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Springvale referred to the impact on and burden faced by local ethnic communities that have to support temporary protection visa holders because the commonwealth is not doing so.

As the Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs I am the state's delegate on the National Ministerial Council of Multicultural Immigration Affairs Ministers. It is my responsibility to attend those meetings. It is my responsibility to hold regular discussions with the federal immigration minister, Mr Ruddock, and these are exactly the sorts of issues that are raised.

The responsibility of the Victorian government in this area is to get best value from the commonwealth for this state, as it is on education or financial issues. It is about the state getting the best value. The state is being affected by allocations from the commonwealth to people who live in this state, and it is my responsibility to undertake negotiations to obtain best value when putting discussion papers to the ministerial council or directly to the minister. I understand opposition members may not follow these matters as closely as they should, but clearly it is a responsibility delegated to me.

Mr Wynne — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the request of the honourable member for Springvale is entirely in order. The request he made concerns the action the state government can take to assist refugees. The state government already provides a range of services particularly for refugees who have come from the Woomera detention centre. Many of those people have found their way into my electorate of Richmond, where the Minister for Housing is providing them with emergency housing.

I recall the Minister for Community Services providing direct support to these people, who basically had been dumped by the federal government, put onto buses, sent to Melbourne and put into hostels.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member for Richmond must not debate the issue.

Mr Wynne — I am not seeking to debate the issue. I put it to you, Mr Acting Speaker, that this matter is entirely in order and within the purview of the state government. The action being requested by the honourable member for Springvale is in order because he requests action the state government can take to further assist the refugees.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! I have heard sufficient on the point of order. The ruling states clearly that when federal and state acts overlap it is in order to raise matters relating to those acts in the debate on the adjournment of the house. A matter must relate directly to the responsibility of a state minister, not to a state minister referring to a federal minister.

When I questioned the honourable member for Springvale, and I admit it was a mumbled answer, I believe he was asking for the support or assistance of the Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs. I do not rule out the question, and I do not uphold the point of order.

Responses

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment) — The honourable member for Geelong asked what action the government would take on vocational education and training (VET) facilities for students participating in the VET in Schools program throughout the state. The honourable member is right to be singing the praises of the program, and Victoria is experiencing a massive increase in demand for access to it. Students are keen on the program as well as on academic courses because

it equips them for further career opportunities, and for work.

The total number of Victorian students accessing the VET in Schools program this year is expected to increase by 30 per cent — a massive explosion. More than 21 000 young Victorians participated in the program last year, and that figure is expected to rise this year to more than 27 000 students. It is a popular course among students in the post-compulsory years. More than 94 per cent of the students who participated in the program had successful outcomes.

It is unfortunate that while there has been enormous growth in demand for the program in Victoria, and Victoria has increased funding by almost 60 per cent this year to ensure that students can access the courses, the federal government at the same time has reduced funding by 2 per cent. It is a clear indication that while the federal government makes policies on innovation and growth in education it is not prepared to be responsible on funding. Although Dr Kemp engages in fancy advertising, he is not prepared to put real funding into this program.

The state government strongly supports vocational education and training in schools — known as VET in Schools — and provides the lion's share of funding for it. Dr Kemp merely funds the advertising. He will not fund the students in the VET in Schools program.

I am pleased to announce additional funding for VET in Schools skills centres, in conjunction with Australian National Training Authority funding. Those centres will provide vocational education and training programs around Victoria. The government has already put in the money for the students to do the courses, but it also needs to be sure that capital facilities are available, and that is why, in collaboration with ANTA, it is providing additional funding.

The Catholic regional college in Geelong, in the honourable member's own electorate, has received \$176 000 to develop an information technology and multimedia skills centre, and all secondary school students in the Geelong region will have the opportunity to participate in the use of that facility. Sebastopol Secondary College will receive \$111 000 to develop an engineering skills centre, and Mornington Secondary College will receive more than \$136 000 to develop a multimedia and information technology skills centre. Salesian College in Sunbury will develop a horticultural skills centre with a \$155 000 funding boost, and Brimbank College will receive almost \$65 000 for a building and construction skills centre. Seymour Technical High School will get over \$155 000

to upgrade its existing automotive skills centre and is exceptionally happy to receive that funding, as was indicated when I visited the school.

All of those projects are strongly supported by their local communities and will certainly add significantly to the Bracks government's VET in Schools program, which operates alongside the Victorian certificate of education program in schools to ensure that more young people stay within the education and training network.

The honourable member for Carrum expressed concerns about events at Chisholm TAFE institute and the review of that institute's situation that I announced last week. I draw to the attention of the honourable member and all honourable members concerns that had to be addressed by the Bracks government as a result of a \$2.2 million debt incurred by Chisholm institute under the Kennett government in the 1999 calendar year, rising to \$4.4 million last year. Honourable members may recall that the Chisholm institute was born of an amalgamation of three institutions conducted under the auspices of the previous Minister for Tertiary Education and Training, the honourable member for Warrandyte. He presided over and led the amalgamation of the three institutes, each of which had significant financial difficulties at the time. The forced amalgamation process he fostered did not address fundamental funding issues — —

Mr Wilson interjected.

Ms KOSKY — What has the Bracks government done? It has provided significant additional dollars to all TAFE institutes across the state to deal with the financial difficulties they were facing when the government came into office. As a result all but Chisholm have managed to solve their financial problems. Chisholm, however, due to its forced amalgamation and the absence of the additional funds required to establish proper support systems for the new institute, failed to deal fully with its financial difficulties.

The institute serves a very important area of Victoria, the south-eastern corridor — a region with significant manufacturing needs. The previous minister did not keep his eye on the ball.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! There is too much conversation in the chamber.

Ms KOSKY — He presided over an amalgamation that has not worked.

The honourable member for Hawthorn has suggested that the government's review is simply a process to look after senior executives at the Chisholm Institute, yet the honourable member for Warrandyte suggests that the government should not blame the teachers. The honourable members should get together and at least get their lines right. They are both wrong. The government has provided additional funding for Chisholm Institute, as it has for other institutes. Unfortunately, they are still in difficulty. The Honourable Cameron Boardman, a member for Chelsea Province in the other place, was a member of the Chisholm Institute board at the time the issues developed, yet he did not raise them with government. He sat on his hands and did nothing. He did not address the difficulties faced by that institute, but instead contributed to them.

The review established by the government will report within a three-month period. It will address the financial difficulties of the Chisholm Institute and recommend how Victoria's institutes can focus on providing skills rather than be constantly looking at the bottom line. I remind the honourable member for Warrandyte of the mistakes he made as a minister, especially those concerning the Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE, which this government has dealt with. That institute is looking forward to further developing the skills it provides to the community and now is not focused on its debt.

The government is addressing the concerns of Chisholm Institute, unlike the previous government and the previous minister.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — The honourable member for Warrandyte raised with me a black spot request concerning Glenvale Road, which borders the municipalities of Manningham and Maroondah. He graphically described the road and indicated the treatment required to bring it up to an acceptable standard. The honourable member requested that it be considered under the black spot program and asked me to inspect the road.

The black spot program is a terrific initiative of the Bracks government.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BATCHELOR — I hear cries of 'Hear, hear!' from around the chamber because members on both sides acknowledge the strength of the campaign and have taken advantage of it to improve the road safety outcomes in their electorates, unlike the honourable member for Warrandyte, who has a reputation of being

a lazy local member — one of the laziest local members in Parliament. He is well known as Lazy Warrandyte.

The black spot program provides funding for road safety improvements on state roads, local roads, rural roads and roads in metropolitan Melbourne. I am not familiar with the road. There are many roads in Victoria with which I am not familiar. Because of that, we have a hard-working advisory program committee that makes recommendations to me as the minister as to how the funds ought to be allocated.

The honourable member for Warrandyte attempted to politicise the program by casting slurs on members of the program advisory committee, and that was a despicable act. The program advisory committee includes members of Victoria Police, the municipal association, local government and the Victorian Farmers Federation, who put in the hard work —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! There is too much audible conversation in the chamber.

Mr BATCHELOR — The committee makes recommendations and saves lives, unlike the honourable member for Warrandyte, who has failed to do that. The program is based on nominations from organisations, individuals, councils and anybody who would like to put in a nomination form.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BATCHELOR — Even the honourable member for Warrandyte is entitled to put in a nomination form, and I ask him to do that. I ask him — have you done it?

Mr Honeywood — Yes.

Mr BATCHELOR — Good. Apparently the honourable member is one of the 2600 people who have requested various treatments across Victoria. As of January 2001 some 2600 nominations covering around 1500 individual projects had been received. To date nearly \$70 million has been approved for the program. A large number of projects are being funded at the moment.

I recommend that the honourable member for Warrandyte follow the progress of his nomination through the web site. He can do that, as others who have nominated can follow the progress of their nominations.

The government will contact the two local councils and seek their views on the nomination, and I am sure the physical description matches the description given by the honourable member for Warrandyte. However, the government has to ensure the program is rigorous and is properly evaluated. The government seeks the views of local councils, which we will do in this case or may already have done if it has been nominated as the honourable member for Warrandyte has said. I will check its progress tomorrow.

It is important to understand that criteria are laid down and that the general construction and building of roads are not part of the criteria. The program is about treating specific locations and correcting existing or potentially dangerous features of those locations. It is not to be used as an alternative source of funding for general road construction, no matter how bad the existing length of road may be.

The government is happy to examine the nomination in light of the existing criteria. It will look at the recommendations of the local councils and, of course, consider the recommendations of the program advisory committee as to whether the nomination fits the evaluation criteria.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — The honourable member for Warrnambool caused much merriment in the chamber with his hilarious quips about why, in that marvellous announcement on new initiatives for safety on school buses, the government did not announce the fact that it would not have mobile phones in buses but rather would have satellite phones.

I know the honourable member for Warrnambool has been a member for a short time only, but he has had a fair amount of time — —

Opposition members interjecting.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Settle down, just relax! The honourable member has spent a lot of time travelling around country Victoria and should know the answer to his own question. If you travel around the state you soon discover that mobile phones do not work all over country Victoria — that is the point! After much investigation and research by the Department of Infrastructure, it was deemed that a satellite phone is far more effective — —

An opposition member interjected.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Not in the Otways — nothing works in the Otways! It was deemed that satellite phones are far more effective than mobile phones, or indeed short-wave radios. While no system

is absolutely foolproof, it is clear that the satellite phone works in more areas of country Victoria than either the mobile phone or the short-wave radio.

Secondly, concern was expressed about the fact that satellite phones are hands free and that at times in certain parts of Victoria the driver may have to stop and get out of the bus to get a signal to use the phone. That is the whole point. The government is putting satellite phones in the buses for emergencies. They will not be there to ring home to find out who is collecting the milk that night; they will be there for emergencies. If there were an emergency one would hope the bus would stop and be stationary.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member for Warrandyte!

Ms DELAHUNTY — It would be stationary if there had been a crash. That is the point.

Opposition members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable members for Bennettswood and Warrandyte!

Ms DELAHUNTY — Thirdly, it is better for parents to know that in the case of an emergency at least the bus their children are travelling on has a satellite phone rather than a mobile phone, which if used in the event of an accident may say, 'Sorry, no network'.

Fourthly, as the honourable member for Warrnambool has acknowledged, it is a fantastic initiative. Victoria now has 1600 free school buses that take approximately 80 000 primary and secondary school students to and from school every day. The parents of those children know that under this government — unlike under the previous government when there were not enough school buses and certainly no telephone facilities on the buses it did have — the school buses will be equipped with satellite phones to be used in emergencies to call for assistance.

There was also some concern about bus drivers having to lean over to reach their mobile or satellite phones to answer incoming calls, and that is exactly right — they would. However, the government does not encourage the use by bus drivers of those phones for general communication. It is insistent that the phones are to be used in the case of emergencies only.

It is a fantastic initiative that has been announced and country Victorians are delirious about it. The initiative will be introduced alongside more flexible access to the school bus service for Victorian certificate of education students and technical and further education students, and the establishment of a safety code of conduct for student passengers.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Ms DELAHUNTY — As the honourable member for Warrandyte says in his fairly puerile interjection, this is an internal report only. It is a magnificent work in progress. Country Victorians are applauding the government for finally taking bus safety seriously.

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The honourable member for Narracan brought to my attention the issue of the Country Fire Authority in this the International Year of Volunteers. He asked what action the government would be taking to highlight the role played by CFA volunteers in this very important year of recognition for volunteers throughout the world.

While he was doing that I noticed that members of the opposition were mocking him because they think everything is a big joke. What they do not realise is that the honourable member for Narracan is a serving operational volunteer with his CFA brigade. That is a level of commitment that would do any member of this house proud. The honourable member for Narracan was telling me earlier tonight that he had recently turned out at a fire and when coming back on the truck in his overalls he was asked what he did.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! There is too much audible conversation on both sides of the chamber. The honourable member for Cranbourne will take his seat.

Mr HAERMEYER — One of the people on the truck was stunned to find that the person who had been out there fighting the fire shoulder to shoulder with him was his local member of Parliament.

The people who make up the volunteer emergency services in this state need to be recognised. The Country Fire Authority has 63 000 volunteers and is the largest volunteer firefighting service anywhere in the world. On top of that there are 8000 volunteers in the State Emergency Service. These people are heroes. I know it is an overused term but it truly fits these people. In many cases the volunteers have jobs during the day and then do another job which involves turning

out, pulling people out of road accidents, fighting fires and helping to protect people's homes from floods.

The volunteers do a magnificent job. Often they are unable to attend important family events or have to get out of bed in the middle of the night and attend a call-out, or they are called away from their places of employment. That is not recognised by many members of the community, who seem to think that they are full-time career employees.

The government is determined to ensure that the International Year of Volunteers is used to help the community recognise the role played by the volunteers in the emergency services, the Country Fire Authority and the State Emergency Service. We want people to recognise that these people are there, that they are volunteers and that they are as professional as they come. Professionalism has everything to do with attitude and proficiency and not with whether one is paid to do the job. We need to encourage these people and provide them with some appreciation and recognition. We also need to encourage people in the broader community to contribute in some way — if not by becoming volunteers in their own right, by providing some other support behind the scenes. If we take these people for granted, one day when we expect them to be there they will not be. That is important.

Last Sunday I went to the Werribee CFA brigade and we launched an advertising campaign which is about saying thank you to the volunteers of the CFA. It is being funded out of the special resource initiative of \$27.5 million which was voted to the CFA last year.

Opposition members interjecting.

Mr HAERMEYER — Members opposite think it is all a bit funny. They obviously take their CFA brigades for granted because they treat them with contempt. These ads are about challenging people's perceptions of what the CFA is about, making the point that these people are there and they are highly trained volunteers, and making clear what sort of sacrifices they and their families are making.

The campaign is doing a great job in helping the community to recognise the precious commodity of volunteers that make up Victoria's emergency services and the Country Fire Authority in particular.

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) — The honourable member for Swan Hill raised the issue of small town sewerage and the refunds provided by the government to people who had already paid the large up-front capital fees demanded under the former government's sewerage schemes.

The Bracks government has changed the funding basis of sewerage schemes in 60 country towns. Some \$22.5 million has been allocated to the programs which has brought the capital up-front payments down from around \$2000 or \$3000 in some cases to \$800 up front or \$80 per year. The new schemes have been well received. They have allayed the concerns of people in those towns who were outraged, distressed and angry about the former government's schemes imposed upon them without any real consultation. They caused great hostility, and I believe they were some of the main reasons why the former government lost the votes of rural and regional Victorians.

The honourable member for Swan Hill raised the issue of refunds where properties have been sold in the meantime. Different circumstances applied in each instance. The government sought legal opinion upon which it has acted. Some people argued that the amount paid for sewerage schemes was reflected in the purchase price.

The honourable member for Gippsland East raised the issue of ornamental seastars. One of his constituents had imported them from the Philippines. When placed in salt water they appeared to come to life and he speculated on what might happen should that occur in Australian waters. Fortunately, they had merely rehydrated. However, it was a lesson learnt without problems arising.

Exotic marine pests have caused many problems over the past 150 years. Hundreds of those pests have been introduced around the coastline, 10 of which have become significant pests, including the northern Pacific seastar.

Together with the Minister for Energy and Resources in another place I last week launched a package of initiatives to tackle the problem of marine pests. A national demonstration project designed to prevent ships discharging ballast water is planned at the port of Hastings. Various exotic marine pests are discharged along with the ballast water. The project will be picked up around the country and also internationally once its success has been proven.

A baseline port survey will be carried out to establish what is currently in Victoria's ports. That will be very useful for the port managers. The government also launched as an educational tool a display at the Melbourne Aquarium on ballast water and exotic marine pests. It is an issue the government is taking very seriously and on which it has undertaken a number of projects.

The honourable member for Dromana raised with me the expiration 12 months ago of the lease of the McCrae Yacht Club on the Rosebud foreshore. I will take the matter up with Parks Victoria and see what is happening there.

Ms PIKE (Minister for Housing) — I thank the honourable member for Tullamarine for raising the matter of the community development program at the public housing estate at the Mews in Westmeadows, because it really highlights the way the government is committed to fostering local community development. The government is committed to a whole range of progressive policies that not only focus on bricks-and-mortar development in public housing but also look at ways to develop healthier and happier communities throughout the state. It is pleased to support the program and provide \$27 500 to Outreach Victoria through the rental housing program.

Outreach Victoria is a terrific program. The group involved in it enjoys a lot of support in the local community — from the City of Hume, local sporting clubs, schools and the local police. It has already been involved in some tree planting in the area and is inviting members of the local community to take some pride in that community and trying to engage them in participating in building it.

Over the next six months the Mews recreational program will see a whole range of sporting activities for kids of all ages. However, the program is not just about having a good time and bringing people together, it also has a very important health awareness focus. As part of the program the locally based community health centre is consulting local residents and raising a lot of relevant community issues. It is looking at things such as health care, nutrition and parenting skills. It is even raising more serious issues, such as substance abuse. It is an opportunity for young and older people to come together to build healthier lifestyles and to do things that will ensure a more promising future for them.

Public housing is about more than providing four walls and a roof. It gives the government a terrific opportunity to do the kind of work we are discussing and provides the capacity to offer a framework on which to build a more integrated, sustainable and lively community. The community has a particular responsibility for young people and for ensuring it provides activities that will instil in them a sense of pride and self-worth. I am pleased the government has supported Outreach Victoria in this very important work.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs) — I thank the honourable member for Springvale for raising this matter with me. He regularly sees the impact of 200 or so temporary protection visa refugees on the Dandenong–Springvale region, which is facing a severe burden. The 560-odd temporary protection visa refugees are locating themselves in four key parts of Victoria: the Darebin region, the Greater Dandenong region, Sunraysia at Mildura, and Shepparton and surrounding districts, including Cobram.

The federal government has a policy with regard to temporary protection visa refugees. People in detention are released to the community if they are deemed to be genuine refugees, and they are being asked to apply for permanent residency. The people who have been abandoned end up migrating to places such as Victoria. Why is that the case? Victoria is tolerant. It is the most multicultural state and the refugees are predominantly from Afghani, Iraqi and other similar communities. There is no-one else to support them, so they come to Victoria and rely on support from local communities. As a result those local communities are facing a big burden. People have refugees living in their houses, and as the number of temporary protection visa refugees grows the impact and burden on local ethnic communities in Victoria is severe, particularly in the four regions I mentioned.

What does the federal government do? Some 12 000 refugees are allowed into Australia each year. The federal government provides English lessons, job-seeking assistance, settlement support and accommodation for refugees. However, those provisions are not available to temporary protection visa refugees despite the government's budgeting for them. The temporary protection visa refugees come from the 12 000 refugee category, yet the federal government pockets that money. That money has meant \$5 million less coming into Victoria to support refugees who are being abandoned to local non-government organisations, local councils and local ethnic communities.

The state government has contributed \$685 000 to support those communities, including a recent \$100 000 grant, \$30 000 of which went to the City of Greater Dandenong to provide direct support. The money could be used to partly fund a worker in order to assist those communities; it could go into paying for bond assistance to get rental accommodation; it could be used to provide material aid — hiring a truck to collect bedding and household furniture such as old fridges that could be used in rental accommodation; or it could be used to provide English lessons. This has been a key

issue in all states, including Liberal states. Former Liberal states such as Western Australia have been critical of the way the federal government has handled the issue, because state governments and local communities are being left with the burden.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — It was an agenda item at the last ministerial council meeting. Victoria is putting the issue on the agenda at the next ministerial council meeting to be held in Sydney in April, which I will attend. It is sending a strong and clear message to the federal government. Minister Ruddock has been critical of Victoria because it is taking a leadership role and because for so long the federal government has been saying it is not short-changing the refugees and pocketing the money.

The calculations done by the state government on behalf of all states highlight that the federal government is making a saving of approximately \$10 000 per temporary protection visa refugee who is released, because all other refugees receive that \$10 000 to enable them to settle as quickly as possible in the community. Those people will most probably be future Australian citizens, and that is not the way to treat them. That is why the world community is looking at Australia and saying it is treating refugees poorly. We are locking them up, and then when we decide to release them we dump them without proper support or proper resources. We are creating second-class citizens in Third World conditions.

I have been to places such as Shepparton with an honourable member for North Eastern Province in the other place who has been very supportive on the issue. We saw the Third World standards in which these people are living. Sometimes seven or eight people sleep on the floor with only a blanket. Honourable members would not expect to see this sort of situation in some Third World countries, but they can see it in Dandenong, Darebin, Shepparton or Mildura, all thanks to the commonwealth government.

I thank the honourable member for Springvale for raising the issue. It will be put on the ministerial council agenda for April. Victoria is mobilising other states and the issue will become a federal election issue. The federal government needs to listen, reduce the burden on ethnic communities and start paying its way.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment, responding to issues raised by the honourable member for Bennettswood, for the

attention of the Minister for Health, and the honourable member for Glen Waverley, for the attention of the Treasurer.

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment) — The honourable member for Bennettswood raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health. While I understand the Minister for Major Projects and Tourism is chairing the task force considering the impact of the grand prix on the surrounding areas, I will draw the matter to the attention of the Minister for Health, and I am sure a response will be forthcoming.

The honourable member for Glen Waverley has drawn to the attention of the Treasurer an issue relating to Brigadier E. J. Compton and stamp duty. I will draw that to the attention of the Treasurer so that he can respond promptly.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 11.20 p.m.