

Mr MARTIN (Elwick) - Mr Deputy President, I would like to start my response with seven quotes that I think are worth highlighting in relation to the Premier's address to the Parliament. The reason is that I was sitting in the Chamber when a wave of déjà vu came over me. I did a little bit of research. The first quote is:

'A safe future for our children, security for our families and confident communities.'

The second is:

'We are on the job and we are using the same responsible management principles to mend them that we used to fix the economy.'

The third is:

'We are determined to assist people to buy a home and we want to give young Tasmanians the helping hand they need.'

Mr Wilkinson - Do you have the right document?

Mr MARTIN - Sounds familiar, though, doesn't it?

The fourth quote is:

'Over the past few months we have been looking at ways to provide more housing assistance to the most needy in our community.'

The fifth is:

'We are serious about our public housing responsibilities and we recognise there is more to be done to assist Tasmanians on low incomes that are having problems finding affordable housing.'

The sixth quote is:

'We are committed to ensuring that children live safe, healthy and happy lives; lives where they can achieve the full potential and have the ability to fully participate in society. To achieve this requires a strategic commitment to early learning.'

And the final quote is:

'The national literacy and numeracy benchmark results show that we are outperforming the national average in some age groups and are up there with the best in others. Despite these positive results there is still more to do.'

That has changed a bit recently.

All of these are great statements, Mr Deputy President, and they are statements that I strongly support. They were words said by the Premier but they were not said on 4 March 2008 in this year's

state of the State address, they were said on 20 September 2005 in the Premier's state of the State address some 29 months ago.

However, let us not focus too much on the distant past. Let us look at five more recent statements from the Premier. The first is:

'Strong communities need social and cultural progress too – social and cultural leadership.'

The second is:

'Health, education and affordable housing are our leading social priorities.'

The third is:

'This is the strong beginning of a new era for affordable housing in Tasmania. We are providing socially progressive, cooperative and innovative solutions to increasing the stock of affordable housing to make sure we can meet growing demands into the future.'

The fourth is:

'The community has every right to expect the highest levels of accountability, transparency, responsibility and governance from their elected representatives.'

Finally, I quote:

'We are creating a State that has a strong economy with strong communities.'

Yes, Mr Deputy President, these statements are more recent but again they were not made this week. They were from 26 September 2006, in that year's state of the State address, about 70 weeks ago. My purpose for drawing attention to these statements is to draw attention to the old adage, look at what the man does, not what he says, or more concisely, actions speak louder than words.

The point I am making is that we have heard most of what was said by the Premier on Tuesday in another place on a number of occasions. The reality is things have become worse in most of the areas that the Premier stated were his highest priority as much as three years ago. In 2005, 2006 and 2007 and now again in 2008 we heard that his highest priorities are affordable housing, better education for our children and strong and vibrant communities where the most disadvantaged are looked after. This is pretty well what he said this year. Whilst I heard what the Premier said and I can only agree with him on most of what he says in these set pieces, the problem is that there is often very little follow through. In particular there is no money in the Budget to meet the rhetoric.

I congratulate the Premier on his virtuous objectives but that is simply not enough. There is a need for action to address the issues that the Premier has correctly raised and there is also a need for money to be allocated and to be spent. Also there is a need for galvanising the public service, community bodies and other levels of government and the goodwill of many people to make a real difference. That is the only way that a lot of these problems will be fixed. Just including them in a state of the State speech each year is not going to achieve anything and this certainly has been the case in the last three years.

Before I go on, let me say that there have been some commitments in the state of the State address by the Premier that have been followed through. Perhaps the most significant of these was the commitment to Tasmania's Aboriginal people and the provision of compensation to the Stolen Generations. I congratulate the Premier on the national leadership he has shown. Likewise I also would like to join the Premier in congratulating the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, for the incredible leadership he has shown in making -

Mr Parkinson - Spoken like a good party member.

Mr MARTIN - the apology to the indigenous community. I think that this Parliament, about 11 years ago in 1997, was the first State to make an apology. I am also proud that I was mayor of the City of Glenorchy in 1997 when we were the first council in Tasmania to do likewise. It makes the former Prime Minister seem fairly irrelevant. I suppose I can say that compassion has returned to Canberra.

One thing that I would like to specifically comment on is the Premier's new found desire to look to experts outside the Tasmanian public service. A number of honourable members have already spoken about this. He told the Parliament and the people of Tasmania that he is going to appoint or he has appointed a number of highly regarded experts. I think since Tuesday a number of ministers have announced other appointments. I heard Minister Bartlett announcing some appointments today.

Given the comments I have already made I can only draw two conclusions, that this seems to be a delaying tactic rather than a genuine attempt to seek the best advice. If these were all priorities three years ago that is when the advice should have been received. It is three years too late. Given that the Premier has been saying that the issues that he is now seeking advice on are his highest priority, what has he been doing for the last three years when he has promised action on all of those important social issues where he is now seeking advice?

Mr Wilkinson - Mr President, if I could just butt in very quickly. This is a state of the State address but I draw attention to the state of the House as it would seem that we are a bit under a quorum.

Quorum formed.

Mr MARTIN - As I was saying, I was talking about the Premier's appointment of outside experts. Basically what concerns me is that all of these areas that have now had experts appointed for new advice the Premier has stated they have been his priority issues for the last three years. The Premier has indicated that he is seeking external advice in a number of major areas.

First, he has sought advice on social inclusion but, Mr President, the Premier has already tabled a report entitled 'State of our Community Report 2007' which is this document tabled this week. In that is chapter 5 which is entitled 'What Needs to be Done' so what is needed is not really more advice on what needs to be done because we have already got it in a report. What is needed is for the Premier to announce the funding and get on with it.

Second, he sought advice on affordable housing and homelessness from another international expert and, Mr Deputy President, he did not even mention the fact that the Tasmanian taxpayer has

already funded a major study into these issues by a committee of this Chamber and that the committee will report in a few weeks' time. I will say more about this later.

Third, the Premier sought advice on literacy and numeracy. Mr Deputy President, what more is to be said about this particular subject? This issue has been well researched and researched and researched and researched. What is needed is more resources, more money. Fourthly, the Premier is seeking more advice on how to give Tasmanian children the best possible start in life. Why, for heaven's sake, does the Government need more advice on this when there is already a great range of advice that has been put before us and most of it has been pointing to the need for more targeted assistance to young kids. I could go on with other examples of new inquiries or reviews, such as for disability services or the planning system, about which I will say more in a moment, or the implementation of irrigation projects.

I suppose I am left with the impression that there could be two reasons for this approach of the Premier to seek more advice. The first is that he has no idea what to do and decided that after three years of promising that things will happen and they do not, he needs to buy some more time. The second possible reason is that he has lost faith in the Tasmanian Public Service. Some people are speculating that he has lost faith in his ministers because he seems to be imposing himself on every portfolio at the moment.

Mr Parkinson - Spoken like a true Liberal.

Mr MARTIN - So I am a Liberal now? Actually that is really interesting because you said I was a good true party member a minute ago -

Mr Parkinson - I said 'spoken like'. I was referring to what you said.

Mr MARTIN - It actually reminds me that, I think about this time last year when I spoke against the process for the pulp mill, the Government put out a media release in the name of what's his name?

Mr Parkinson - That's spoken like a true Green.

Members laughing.

Mr MARTIN - I am coming to that.

There was a media release today - and I think he was called the attack dog - by Graeme Sturgess. He used to be around Glenorchy.

Ms Thorp - I think it's the honourable member for Denison, isn't it?

Mr MARTIN - He is not 'the honourable', actually, it is just the member for Denison. He was sent out as the attack dog on me and there was a wonderful media release because I spoke against the process - 'the greening of Terry Martin'. I resisted the temptation to put out a media release about the day of the greening of Paul Lennon. Lennon pushed for green cars and that was a good part.

Ms Ritchie - There's a bit of green in all of us, isn't there?

Mr MARTIN - Well, there is in most of us but I did not expect it in the Premier actually. It is good to see.

Mrs Jamieson - He's getting out there pushing these cars.

Mr MARTIN - Yes.

Mr Parkinson - I'm surprised you resisted a press release.

Mr MARTIN - It was tempting - so tempting. I just could not resist bringing it up today.

As I said, it does appear that maybe he has lost a little bit of faith in his ministers. Mr Deputy President, I happen to think that there is an enormous amount of talent in this State's public service, talent that may not be effectively utilised. I think if he had listened more to his public servants he would learn that they have most of the answers to the questions he asks. If he listened more to his backbench he would also learn that they have a lot to offer as well.

You can nod your heads. I think if he listened more to other parliamentarians then he would be much better off as well, including the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Greens and the independent members of this House.

What galls me I suppose somewhat, Mr President, is a couple of things. Firstly the Premier has been quite critical of me for articulating the core social values and the social justice values of the Labor Party and speaking about a lot of the issues that in fact the Premier has laid in his 2008 address. He has basically agreed in this address with a lot of things I have been talking about for the past 12 months. I have spoken a great deal on a number of personal meetings with the Premier about the need to deal with the housing crisis but he refused to do anything. I told him that there was a need to build a more compassionate society and pursue more inclusiveness.

Mr Parkinson - It is quite unfair saying he refused to do anything when there have been budget allocations in that area ever since you came in here and before that. It is quite unfair to put it in that way.

Mr MARTIN - I will say a lot more about that in a moment. There is a lot more to be said about that. As I said, I told him about the need to develop a more compassionate society, pursue more inclusiveness, and I think the words he used were that I was dreaming.

I told him to place more emphasis on children and giving them more hope but he said it was all under control. It is also interesting, the global warming thing I have already spoken about. The second thing that galled me was that few actual measurable commitments were outlined by the Premier in the state of the State speech. I think, as far as I can see, there are only two new measurable commitments outlined in his speech. The first is that he will establish a current benchmark figure for homelessness in Tasmania and the second is that he will, and I quote 'halve the number of people "sleeping rough" by the end of 2010'. Quite frankly, Mr Deputy President, that is not much in the way of measurable commitments from a speech of nearly 8 000 words. That is the trouble I have with this state of the State address. There are plenty of good announcements but not much delivery. This is my challenge to the Premier and also to the honourable Treasurer -

Mr Aird - We do not need challenges from you, quite frankly.

Mr MARTIN - I am going to give them anyway.

Mr Aird - If you want to put it in a way which is proactive and engaging you do not issue challenges. It is not about a challenge, it is about proffering ideas that may deserve support.

Mr MARTIN - But the Government keeps challenging me.

Mr Aird - We do not challenge you over anything.

Mr MARTIN - I would think -.....

Mr Aird - No challenge.

Mr MARTIN - Okay, request then. Are you happy with the word 'request'?

Mr Aird - I think if you want people to engage people to respond in a positive way you use language which is going to at least induce some sympathy or empathy for your view.

Mr MARTIN - Okay. I will request then.

Mr Parkinson - You've been 10 minutes so far and I have not heard one positive suggestion.

Mr MARTIN - I will come to a few in a minute. I have a fair way to go yet, it is only 10 minutes.

Mr Parkinson - I await with interest.

Mr MARTIN - My request is this: let us have the measurable benchmarks on achieving these latest priorities.

Mr Aird - He has done that. If you read his speech there are.

Mr MARTIN - There are two commitments, two benchmarks in 8 000 words. The second one is let us see the promises with dollars committed in the forthcoming budget. I think we will be back here in 12 months' time with another state of the State repeating exactly the same rhetoric referred to in the last three.

Mr Deputy President, I hope sincerely that the Premier is serious this time in the comments he has made. I hope he has listened to what people have been telling him and I hope that the money is allocated in the next budget because if these measurable commitments are not there and the dollars are not there then the people of Tasmania will know that he is not serious and that he has not changed at all and that in March 2010 little will have changed.

That brings me to an issue that I imagine most honourable members would think I would talk about and that is the issue of affordable housing.

Mr Dean - I did not know whether you would or not.

Mr MARTIN - Yes. And as the Leader has almost kind of challenged me about the funding commitments over the last four years that I have been here. A couple of weeks ago I listened to and

watched with much interest the Premier's announcements together with the honourable Treasurer. Just as an aside, I was a bit surprised that the Minister for Health was not part of that announcement at the same time, as she gives out all the bad news.

I was really delighted that the Treasurer announced the \$60 million for affordable housing. I think they also indicated at the time that there would be more announcements to come in the near future. So I suppose my expectations, together with those of the community sector who have been fighting for more funding for affordable housing for at least three years, I think, had been built up that there might be quite a few announcements in the state of the State speech.

I really did have very high expectations when I walked into the House of Assembly on Tuesday. I waited with much anticipation for the major announcements. First of all there was the news that we had lobbied and been made deputy chair of COAG's housing task force. I then heard that, as I have already indicated, another expert authority has been appointed to make yet another study into housing.

The only other thing was the benchmark announced by the Premier, working out a benchmark for homelessness. It is going to be very difficult to do but it certainly needs to be done. Then there is the announcement that the benchmark is that we are going to halve homelessness by the year 2010. I will say a bit more about that in a moment.

I was pleased with some of the Premier's rhetoric because there certainly were a lot of comments that the Premier made in his speech that I totally agree with. The Premier said this:

'I have said on a number of occasions that providing affordable and public housing for those in need is a core social responsibility of government.'

It was very good to hear the honourable member for Rumney articulate yesterday the Labor Party's core social values; that is really important and I was really pleased to hear that.

The Premier went on to say:

'A strong Tasmanian economy has seen the value of our rise greatly over the last decade. Thousands of Tasmanians have been able to enjoy the growth in the worth of the real estate assets. However, that growth has come at some cost. One side effect of the housing prices boom has been that it has become harder for those doing it tough in our community to afford to rent or buy a home of their own.'

That is all very true and all exactly what I said about two and a half years ago and which everyone in the community sector has been saying for the past three years.

The Premier went on to say:

'I am not prepared to accept a situation in Tasmania where people in need of emergency accommodation can't find it. It is our responsibility as a government and as a community to make sure that the homeless are not a shunned and forgotten part of our society. Addressing homelessness is not just about providing a roof and a hot meal. It is about providing a whole-of-life plan for people who are experiencing hardships which result in them having nowhere to call home.'

They are all statements that I passionately agree with. The problem was, listening and reading this yesterday at home, I could not agree more with what I was reading but I started to build myself up into a rage.

Members laughing.

Mr MARTIN - A rage; because it was like the light-globe moment for the Premier, that he had suddenly discovered these problems exist. I started to think well, has he just been alerted to this in the past couple of months? If you go back to the very first speech I made in this Chamber on the issue of housing you will find it was 13 October 2005. It was on a notice of motion put forward by the honourable member for Montgomery on the Special Report No. 57 of the Auditor-General entitled 'Public Housing: Meeting the need?'. I quote what I said at the start of my contribution that day.

Mr Dean - You were a member of the party at that stage, weren't you?

Mr MARTIN - I was. I said:

I think that it is an all-too-stark reminder of the fact that housing is now the greatest social challenge facing this State. The report, I think, is an honest and accurate appraisal of the challenges which this State Government, the building industry and in fact the whole community now face in ensuring that all Tasmanians are able to access affordable housing. The report clearly shows, as the honourable member for Montgomery has already said, that even though the Government's Affordable Housing strategy stage 1 is unquestionably nation-leading, groundbreaking public policy, its \$45 million over a two-year investment in the public housing stocks essentially succeeded in minimising the impact of the significant extra demand on housing waiting lists.'

Ms Thorp - What are you quoting from?

Mr MARTIN - The Auditor-General's Special Report No. 57 entitled 'Public Housing: Meeting the needs?'

What the Auditor-General said was that the Affordable Housing strategy stage 1, the \$45 million announced by Jim Bacon, had been successful in stopping the situation from getting worse, it had not actually made a dent. He strongly recommended the implementation of stage 2, the other \$45 million promised by Jim Bacon in late 2003. All of that aspect of what the Premier suddenly discovered in this year's state of the State, the Government was made aware of in October 2005. It should not have been a like-like(?) moment this week.

I will now cover some of the things that I have talked about for sometime in relation to this issue. The select committee is finalising its report at the moment. Nothing that I am about to say is not on the public record and privy only to the select committee so I am not in any way breaching the Standing Orders.

What has brought this crisis about is the housing boom we had at the start of this century. That housing boom has been an overwhelmingly positive thing for Tasmania. I do not think that anyone

could deny how important it has been to our economy and indeed the general feeling of renewed optimism and confidence across Tasmania in the last few years.

However, my interest in the issue of affordable housing to the point where I felt compelled to try to do something is an outcome of the sheer numbers of my constituents and Glenorchy residents who have approached me since I was elected to Parliament asking for help to find a home. I know from speaking to members representing other electorate offices that they have all experienced the same thing.

Ms Thorp - It is universal, I think.

Mr MARTIN - It certainly is in Tasmania. It has been the overwhelmingly number one issue that has come through the doors of my electorate office in Main Road, Glenorchy and I think that most members have indicated the same thing to me. We all know that people only come to the politicians' offices for help with housing after they have already been unable to reach a satisfactory outcome with real estate agents, Housing Tasmania and community service organisations.

We are not the first port of call but we are usually the last frustrated attempt at getting an outcome from a system that has basically let them down. We all know that by the time they come to us a lot of these people are in pretty dire situations. We have probably all experienced the tears and the pain that we share with a lot of people on this issue.

Like everyone I have had a range of people seek help including families with young children who are sleeping in cars. Some are elderly couples facing eviction simply because the landlord needed to move back into the house and they cannot afford to get into the private market. If they go and live with a relative they know that they will get listed as category 4 not a category 1 and then have no hope of getting a Housing Tasmania property. Also the friendship with their relatives soon wears out. We have all been approached by many individuals who are stuck in an ongoing cycle of crisis accommodation and short-term stays in motels and boarding homes or staying with family and friends.

The simple fact is that housing is a fundamental human right. I think every Australian would agree that in 2007, in this rich country, this rich society we live in, there is no excuse for any Australian not to be able to access shelter. Yet despite an unprecedented period of economic growth in our country and, as we all know, with some of the best economic circumstances ever seen in Tasmania which this State Government deserves enormous credit for, the reality is that housing affordability is now one of the most critical and pressing issues facing our community.

Just how big is this problem? As we know what we saw over the early stages of this decade was an unprecedented growth in the housing market in Tasmania where demand for stock outstripped supply which caused a significant increase in prices and this had two significant effects. First, in some cases it makes it impossible for people to buy their first home and thus enter the real estate market. Second, the increased values lead to increased rents which substantially increases the financial pressure on all tenants and especially those on low incomes. In Tasmania the problem was even greater because our growth was perhaps more pronounced as we had a lot of catching up to do with the booming national market in the late 1990s, a time when our own market remained generally depressed.

Between 2000 and 2007 the reality is that property prices in Tasmania rose by around 120 per cent. As I have said, many Tasmanians benefited enormously from these increases. Everyone who owned real estate benefited greatly and again the State Government deserves a lot of credit for that. But for others and particularly those with low and fixed incomes such as those on welfare payments the side effect was that it became extremely difficult for them to keep pace with these increases.

The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling estimated in 2004 that some 26 000 Australian households, that is 10.6 per cent of the population, were in housing stress. With interest rates having gone up so much in the last four years you would hate to think what that figure is now, it would be a lot more. That means that at least 10.6 per cent of the households are spending more than 30 per cent of household income on housing costs, either rent or mortgage payments. This is considered an unsustainable commitment of expenditure for households because it leads to increased levels of household debt and the reduced capacity of low-income households to meet other necessary expenditures such as food, electricity and medical costs.

When low-income households find it impossible to sustain this level of expenditure on housing they turn to the social housing system, public housing, to act as a safety net. Public housing rents in Tasmania, like in other States, are indexed to household income and therefore a tenant's capacity to pay. It is obviously far more appealing to a low-income earner than private rental and, sure enough, that is exactly what has happened. Between 2001 and 2006, as house prices in Hobart alone rose by 142 per cent, the number of applicants on the public housing waiting list in Tasmania rose by 62 per cent.

Ms Thorp - Through you, Mr Deputy President - what do you think of the idea of when the household income of someone living in public housing reaches \$50 000 they have to leave?

Mr MARTIN - Since that is probably before the select committee I cannot comment on that.

Ms Thorp - Surely you have a position on it as an individual?

Mr MARTIN - Yes, I do but I will not comment at this stage.

Ms Thorp - Some of the other stuff that you are saying would be in the report too, wouldn't it?

Mr MARTIN - No, all this is nothing to do with the report. It is all on the public record. I am just talking about the facts. I am not talking to the solutions and recommendations.

Mr Parkinson - A pity.

Mr MARTIN - It will come. Next time we are in this Chamber, wait for it.

Mr Aird - We were waiting before Christmas but nothing happened. That's why we had to step in.

Mr MARTIN - I would have been doing it next week. I am glad the Treasurer mentioned that because what the committee should have been doing today and yesterday, with two full days set aside to work and finalise the report was disrupted when we discovered that Parliament had been prorogued so that we could have this debate today.

Ms Forrest - Conveniently.

Mr MARTIN - Conveniently. Then of course we would have been in a position to table the report next week. So that is why we now have to wait until April.

Mr Aird - You did not miss any time over prorogation. How much time did you lose through prorogation?

Mr MARTIN - No, but we are here. These were the days we were going to do it. We would have been tabling it next week but now we are not sitting next week.

Mr Aird - Where were you yesterday?

Mrs Jamieson - In the House apparently.

Mrs Smith - We had meetings yesterday and today and -

Mr MARTIN - Where have you been all day? Have you got other things on your mind today?

Mr Aird - So what is the problem?

Mr Parkinson - I hope you are not complaining about prorogation.

Mr MARTIN - I am just trying to work out why it had to happen.

Mr Parkinson - Because the Governor made the order.

Mr MARTIN - Because the Government asked him, yes.

As I was saying, in the five years to 2006 house prices in Hobart rose to 142 per cent, the public housing waiting list rose by 62 per cent. Now 62 per cent more people wanted public housing but what happened? Tasmania's public housing system lacked the capacity to meet this increased demand.

Ms Thorp - Sixty-two per cent, I am not surprised.

Mr MARTIN - Yes, one of the reasons is that governments of both political persuasions have over the last two decades allowed our public housing system to run down with very little additional investment in upgrading stock and building new properties. That is well covered in the Auditor-General's report from three years ago. That left the system unable to cope with such a significant increase in demand over such a short period.

Governments also sold off a lot of excess stock to the private market and in that same period when the waiting list for Housing Tasmania stock rose by 62 per cent, guess what happened to the amount of stock we had? It declined by 11.4 per cent in the same period between 2001 and 2007.

I am not criticising Housing Tasmania for selling off stock, because they have the wrong mix of housing so there is a good reason to sell it off, but if only they were replacing it. Of course the reason they are not replacing it is because they do not have the money.

Over the past decade the level of funding to social housing has dropped by 30 per cent in real terms. Between 1996 and 2005 the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement funding to the States by the Commonwealth fell by 18.4 per cent so we can blame Mr Howard for that. But in the same period matching funding from the Tasmanian Government fell by 19.3 per cent, so in fact Housing Tasmania had 30 per cent less in real terms. That is made worse by the fact that the \$17 million CSHA debt, which is almost 70 per cent of Tasmania's grant, is returned to the Commonwealth by way of repayments.

So the waiting list for public housing currently sits at 2 600 Tasmanians. Over 700 of these applicants are considered a category one applicant, which basically means they are either homeless or in housing situations that are potentially dangerous, and we cannot deny that because those assessments are made by Housing Tasmania staff.

The census 2006 figures show that 754 Tasmanian households live in a caravan, a cabin or a house boat and 172 people are homeless in a tent or on the streets.

Ms Thorp - Having lived in a little shed, it was one of the happiest years of my life.

Mr MARTIN - Was it? So is that what you are saying to all these Tasmanians who are -

Mr Parkinson - Houseboats are not too bad either.

Mr MARTIN - That was by choice.

Ms Thorp - I think it is a bit of elitist to assume that everyone living in sheds, huts and caravans is somehow supposed to -

Mr Aird - Some people call my house a bit of a hut.

Mr MARTIN - I am just stating the facts. I have not made any value judgments. Are you assuming a value judgment, are you?

Ms Thorp - That was how it was sounding to me.

Mr MARTIN - No, I have made no value judgments at all. The reality is that 172 people are homeless in a tent or on the streets. I do not think too many of them are doing that by choice.

Ms Thorp - Is that what it says for homeless, in a tent?

Mr MARTIN - In a tent or on the streets. And of course, census collectors are likely to have missed a number of people because homeless people are a bit hard to find on census night.

These people on the public housing waiting lists often turn to crisis accommodation services for short-term accommodation and the crisis accommodation sector is in crisis too. The number of adults seeking support from crisis accommodation services rose by 28 per cent between 2001 and 2005. In an economically booming time, 28 per cent more Tasmanians are living in crisis accommodation. What is worse than that is that the number of children accompanying them, Tasmanian kids, rose by 39 per cent.

So what has been Tasmania's response to these figures? As I said, in 2004 the Bacon government launched the Affordable Housing Strategy which at the time was the largest ever Tasmanian social policy package and a good one. The strategy committed the Government to invest \$45 million over two years to build and purchase more public housing for people on the waiting lists and there was a promised stage two of another \$45 million following a review into whether stage one was successful or not.

The strategy did a number of other good things - it provided additional funding for private rental support, such as assistance with bonds to help low-income earners to remain in the private rental market, as well as a series of initiatives to assist first home owners to purchase their own homes. These were good strategies and they are still in place and the Government should be congratulated for that. The Affordable Housing Strategy directly resulted in over 400 new homes being built. An independent review of the strategy was conducted.

What did the independent review recommend? It identified the success of the Bacon strategy but it also identified the ongoing crisis and strongly recommended the immediate implementation of the stage 2 funding. However, instead of following the recommendation, what happened? Paul Lennon decided to scrap the Affordable Housing stage 2 money and in December 2005 announced instead the formation of a housing organisation which again I strongly support. It is now known as TAHL. I have always supported that.

In every other State that sort of community housing is seen as a complementary strategy to public housing. That unfortunately is where I differed with the Premier, because the Premier and the Government saw it as being a substitute for investment in public housing and that is why we are now in an even bigger crisis.

In the Premier's speech on Tuesday he said, 'I am not prepared to accept a situation in Tasmania where people in need of emergency accommodation can't find it'. He said, 'It is our responsibility as a government and as a community to make sure that the homeless are not a shunned and forgotten part of our society'. Straight after speaking about housing he started to talk about children, 'One measure of a society is how well it treats its children'.

Well, the result of the Government's inaction on affordable housing in the last three or four years is that 39 per cent more Tasmanian children are living in crisis accommodation. That brings me to the benchmark. The Premier says he is not prepared to accept a situation in Tasmania where people in need of emergency accommodation cannot find it; that it is a responsibility as a government and as a community to make sure that the homeless are not a shunned and forgotten part of our society.

What is the benchmark? Bearing in mind the \$60 million promised, great. But let us not forget the first \$45 million of that was the money that was scrapped from stage two of the Bacon money and if that money had been spent two or three years ago a bloody lot of Tasmanians would have been not living in crisis accommodation, would not have been homeless.

Mr Aird - We did not have it then. You know you can only spend it as you get it. Do you understand that? You would like to do a lot of things -

Mr MARTIN - Why did you make the -

Mr Aird - I would like to change the world, right, now I would like to change the world. Well, funny, I do not have the resources to do it and no-one else does.

Mr MARTIN - Well, let us go back and read the rhetoric at the time because you did not use that as an excuse then. You did not say you scrapped that money at the time. Neither the Premier nor you said that at the time; that is not the excuse you used. You said it was not needed; you said TAHL was a better option.

Mr Aird - TAHL is part of the mix.

Mr MARTIN - I will produce -

Mr Aird - TAHL is part of the mix.

Mr MARTIN - I said that, weren't you just listening to me? I just said it is a great complementary -

Mr Aird - That is exactly right.

Mr MARTIN - But the Premier has argued with me over and over again that it is a substitute for public housing.

Mr Aird - No, he did not.

Mr MARTIN - This is the first time I have heard either you or the Premier say it is because you did not have the money.

Mr Aird - That is not true.

[3.45 p.m.]

Mr MARTIN - And if you did not have the money, why was the announcement made by Jim Bacon in 2003?

Mr Aird - You see, the first stage was announced -

Mr MARTIN - Yes, so you never had the money?

Mr Aird - That is right.

Mr MARTIN - Well, why make the announcement?

Mr Aird - That is another matter, but the fact is that we used the money in the best way we could see fit in getting TAHL set up, and it took a long time to set up -

Mr MARTIN - Yes, which I said at the time it would.

Mr Aird - It is a very complex business, but it is now in a very good position to do a good job, if managed properly.

Mr MARTIN - Yes, I have no doubt about that. But it is not a substitute for public housing.

Mr Aird - That is true. That is why we made the second public housing announcement.

Mr MARTIN - Time and time again the Government have argued with me on that. That is what I have been saying for two-and-a-half years.

Mr Aird - Oh, get a life and get on with it, will you. Fair dinkum!

Mr MARTIN - Well I am really pleased now that the Government are doing it but let us not forget that of the \$60 million, the first \$45 million is the money that was not spent two years ago.

Mr Aird - You are mealy-mouthed.

Mr MARTIN - You want to talk of mealy mouths. Let me say what the Premier said again:

'I am not prepared to accept a situation in Tasmania where people in need of emergency accommodation can't find it. It is our responsibility as a government and as a community to make sure that the homeless are not a shunned and forgotten part of a society.'

And what is the benchmark we come up with? We are going to halve the number of people sleeping rough by the year end of 2010. 'We are not prepared to accept a situation in Tasmania where people in need of emergency accommodation can't find it.' It is not good enough that we halve it. It is not good enough in this rich society that we live in in good economic times that one Tasmanian - I agree with the Premier - is living homeless. It is not good enough. The Premier said it, but then the benchmark, the best benchmark we have in this 8 000-word speech is that we are going to halve it. That is just not good enough; it is pathetic. It should be to abolish it. Where in the core social values of the Labor Party which the honourable member for Rumney reminded us about yesterday, where does it say that Tasmanians deserve to be homeless in these rich economic times that we live in?

I have said the Government deserves a lot of credit for the economic prosperity but at the same time a Labor government should be providing a safety net. Which half of these homeless people are we going to have to tell they are homeless by 2010?

Who will have to live in a tent in the middle of winter in Tasmania, because that is what crisis accommodation providers have to resort to giving to people because there is no more room in emergency accommodation. Half of these people are still going to be doing that two winters from now.

If I could turn to another issue altogether; that is water and sewerage.

Members laughing.

Mr MARTIN - I am pleased to note that the Treasurer, as I said I have already afforded - I am trying to be complimentary. I have already congratulated him on the way he engaged local government, as a number of members in this place were urging to do, and I think the outcome is terrific. There are to be three regional bodies with cross-directorships with local government ownership. But there are a couple of observations I would like to make about this. Again, I support

the outcome and I congratulate the Treasurer on successfully negotiating this with local government. But there are some observations I would like to make.

The first is that there will be significant unintended consequences of this move to three regional bodies. I think these need to be addressed by the State or local government. The main one of these will be the fact that there will be a significant increase in water charges, including a significant increase to those least well off in our community. The Treasurer could probably say to me that it is a matter for the three new regional bodies. It is a role of this Parliament and it is a role of the ruling Government making changes to acts to assist the least well off in the community and I do consider this objective paramount and certainly an essential element of the old ALP philosophy.

Perhaps I could use an analogy. This Parliament and this State Government have acted to recognize that there is a need for special arrangements to be made to assist the poorest in the community in purchasing electricity. There are a number of measures in place where it in fact means that the majority of electricity purchasers pay a little more than they otherwise would to enable concessions to be provided to the poorest in our community and this of course is a deliberate policy of income redistribution, which of course is critical for any society with a social conscience.

The State Government accepts the responsibility, being the organiser of this income redistribution via the pricing and taxation systems. Madam Deputy President, I am sure that we know people who would simply not survive a winter in Tasmania without these generous government concessions being in place for electricity and I believe there is a case for in fact increasing these concessions.

I want to make it clear today that I think there has been a number of people in this State who by the way they have approached the pricing of water and sewerage services have assisted many thousands of the poorest in our community by having their water and sewerage charges lower than they would otherwise have been. I am sure - and I suppose other honourable members would recognise - that when viewed from a simple cost recovery ethos this might not be the most economically efficient way to do things, but I would lay down this comment. I was going to say 'challenge' but I have been scared of saying 'challenge'.

If the system is going to be changed to achieve the goal of greater economic efficiency then there must also be changes to deal with the inevitable increases in water charges for the most vulnerable in our community. Let us call a spade a spade, which is a rates collection system based on land values which is supposed to be progressive in nature - in other words, it has Robin Hood elements - but the objective is to spread the burden to make life a bit easier for those least well off. So if as a result of this water and sewerage reform there are economic efficiencies to be gained, I would be looking for an undertaking from the Government that they will act to introduce a concession scheme that in effect compensates those that cannot afford to pay higher water and sewerage charges in the same way as we do for electricity. There are thousands of them in this State and many in my electorate of Elwick. To date, I have not heard anything from the Government about this but I would hope that it is on their agenda. I simply cannot find any mention of it anywhere.

I have examined the so-called 10 principles for water reform and I have seen no mention of a social safety net but I do know that a leading consultant on water and sewerage reform, which is SAHA International, have at least devoted a paragraph to this in their latest issue. On page 68 they say:

'It is recommended that the Government consider the need to introduce community service activity arrangements to assist in the management of any price changes to be experienced by specific disadvantaged customers.'

Madam Deputy President, this clearly is a commoners' code for the fact that there is going to be a large increase in water charges for some very poor people as a result of these reforms. So my question to the Government is this: are you intending to give a guarantee that from day one there will be a significant concession framework in place funded by the State Government regarding increases in water bills to the poorest people in the State?

I note again in his speech that the Premier said that he cares for the lives of Tasmanians and I will certainly be looking to see that when legislation to implement water and sewerage changes comes before this place there is a clear commitment to the concession framework and money earmarked to go along with the commitment.

The second main issue is to identify another justification for State Government assistance in providing a concession framework and that is namely State Government inaction. I do not just refer to this State Government but successive State governments because I know there has been a lot of whispering, laying the blame for the State Government's intervention in water and sewerage on actions or lack of action by some councils. Although I do accept that there has been a contributory negligence by some councils, State governments over 20 or 30 years are really to blame for most of the problems that have led to the action taken by the Treasurer. I do recognise again that the Treasurer has been prepared to stand up and do something and he deserves enormous praise and congratulations for doing that because he has done that whilst many of his colleagues over the years have done nothing. So I really do commend the Treasurer for doing it. But that does not change the fact that, as is the case in many other areas, it is a sin of omission rather than commission. Put simply the Tasmanian Government over 20 years have sat back and not shown leadership in relation to land-use planning in the State. As the Treasurer would know because he was a champion of the issue at the time he was planning minister in the early 1990s, Tasmania drew up some of the best land-use framework legislation in the country. It was all premised on the fact that there would be a raft of State promises and that never happened. There has been no follow through although this was a fundamental design feature of the system when introduced. I think the select committee report recognised that.

Assurances were given by Minister Cleary. Unfortunately there was a change of Government and Minister Aird did not remain as planning minister to implement this. It may have been different if he had. Minister Cleary's assurances at the time the legislation was introduced that many State policies would be introduced to provide leadership and guidance for all councils basically did not happen. In all other States there is a rigorous framework that seeks to ensure that good public policy is applied when considering the subdivision of large land parcels and the extent of developer contributions. But not in Tasmania. There should be clear framework embodied in either State policies or other instruments in relation to these two issues and many more such as affordable housing, for example.

Some smaller councils compete with each other to offer incentives for developers to subdivide land with little regard to the cost of servicing the blocks and now we have lots of land parcels, many in the wrong place, with no services and a large contingent liability in relation to water and sewerage and other services. It is very easy for people to lay blame at the feet of developers or local councils but the real blame should be laid at the door of successive State Governments in this State for not putting resources into effective land-use planning.

I do congratulate Minister Kons for his role in regional planning at the moment. To me this is another reason the State Government has an obligation to fund a safety net for the new water and sewerage charges. What I would also say to the Government is that unless there is some credible action on the land-use planning side all the good efforts by the Treasurer in relation to water and sewerage reform will just increase the costs of the system overall.

Debate adjourned.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER

Motion by **Mr Parkinson** be agreed to -

That standing order 27 be suspended for this day's sitting.

PREMIER'S ADDRESS

Resumed from above

Mr MARTIN (Elwick) - The third main issues is the debate about water meters. There are a number of people in the cheer squad for water meters but I have to say that it does not follow that their installation necessarily benefits society. There is blind faith in some economic instruments that sometimes leads to perverse results. Let me make it clear that my view is that in some situations the installation of water meters is absolutely the right thing to do. But I believe that most proposed changes in public policy should be evaluated following a cost-benefit assessment, one where all the costs as well as all the benefits are assessed and then a decision made. I will not mention the pulp mill.

Mr Parkinson - I don't suppose you went to experts to do that cost-benefit analysis, did you?

Mr MARTIN - On the pulp mill?

Mr Parkinson - Water meters.

[4.00 p.m.]

Mr MARTIN - Yes. Right from when the decision was made. The point I was making before was that the Premier had all these priority issues three years ago and now after nothing has happened we can judge him for ourselves.

Ms Thorp - That is not fair to say nothing .

Mr Parkinson - Well put the solution forward and just get on with it.

Mr MARTIN - That is what I am saying; get on with it, because reports have been done. What I am saying is that they are very expensive, are they not? A number of councils have had analyses undertaken of the costs and benefits of installing water meters and these have concluded that the costs exceed the benefits. I am sure any responsible economists would understand the importance of that statement.

This is largely to do with the relative contribution of fixed and variable costs. In fact, it is even possible that a reduction in water consumption brought about by the installation of water meters can lead to increases in charges. I am not a believer in the one-size-fits-all rule in relation to water meters and in many other areas of public policy. What I am seeking from the Government is that if an assessment reveals that the cost of installing water meters for a particular community exceeds the benefits, the Government will not try to force the installation on some ideological premise.

Another thing which has not received a lot of coverage in the media and which a lot of people are probably not aware of is that at the moment water charges are heavily subsidised by commercial properties.

I would also like to talk about Sullivans Cove. Again there has been a lot of rhetoric but not a lot has happened and basically I agree with a lot of the comments made by the honourable member for Nelson. To me, Sullivans Cove is the jewel in the crown of not only Hobart but Tasmania. I believe that the Premier showed real leadership when he introduced legislation to establish the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority and I did strongly support that.

As the member for Nelson said, that bill came to this Chamber on 16 November 2004 and by the time it got here there had already been extensive investigations in 2003 under the auspices of the Hobart Waterfront Project. Many years on very little has happened. I will not go over a lot of the detail that the member for Nelson has covered but it seems there has not been an integrated approach to planning and development on any sites. I am concerned that there have been no changes to Princes Wharf three years after the implementation of the bill and I agree with the Leader it probably needs to come down. But we have seen no design; we do not know what is going on at the moment. The place is still full of cars, no new development is planned, the public has not been told what is supposed to be happening, the street furniture is still a mess, there are no additional toilets, there is no better rubbish removal, there is no better graffiti removal, there is no better lighting, there is no more shade, there is no more greenery. I could go on and on. It is a disgrace. The Premier said on 16 November, and I quote:

' ... we have been given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make something very special of the waterfront. I am very pleased to be introducing this bill as the means of this greatly anticipated transformation.'

Well, the fact is that three years on, nothing has changed. You could say it needs more time but in New South Wales the Darling Harbour project was nearly finished three years after the legislation was passed. In Victoria, Southbank was nearly totally transformed in three years. In Brisbane, the Southbank project was well advanced after three years of the planning stage. All were advanced by special statutory authorities, but with good management and sufficient funding. In this State three years on we are still waiting to see the results.

I would also like to express my strong support for the Premier's desire to have a clear election date in four-year terms. This is a great initiative and one which has my total and full support but let us not stop there. Let us look at the electoral reform matter even more closely. Let us have a debate about reform of contributions to political parties because I was really impressed to hear that the Prime Minister has decided to open debate on this at the Federal level. I would like to see the Premier go further and establish a mechanism to reform contributions and introduce appropriate limits on election spending. We in this House have spending limits. I know that in the House of Assembly elections a lot of money is spent and I would like to see some control on that. At least we

should have the debate and that is what I am urging the Government to do. In New South Wales in recent weeks we have had political parties and developers and it is probably not confined to that State.

Mr Parkinson - There used to be a limit in the lower House too.

Mr MARTIN - Yes

Mr Parkinson - It caused so much trouble -

Mr MARTIN - It is really time we looked at it again because there are rumours that some people spend \$90 000 to \$100 000 on their election campaigns and that is ridiculous.

Ms Forrest - Not like the way it is in America - that's obscene.

Mr MARTIN - Yes, but they are only \$100 donations from people, are they not?

Madam Deputy President, I would like to say something about what happens to reports by select committees of this Parliament. Members of this place would be aware that there is considerable dedication involved in sitting on a select committee as well as other committees of this Parliament. There are many reasons why members serve in this way and these include attempting to right wrongs or to shed light on particular issues, sometimes it is to give a voice to people who think the system has failed them, sometimes it is simply to make Tasmania a better place.

In recent years there have been two very important issues looked at by select committees that I would particularly like to mention. The first looked into planning schemes and was chaired by the honourable member for Rowallan. Many Tasmanians gave generously of their time, both in preparing submissions and in giving evidence on this very important matter. Subsequently the committee reported with 17 separate recommendations. On 21 November 2006 the Leader of the Council said, and I quote:

'The Government will provide a formal response to the select committee's report in due course.'

Mr Parkinson - Never a truer word was said.

Mr MARTIN - We have not seen the report yet. Have you a time frame?

Mr Parkinson - In due course.

Mr MARTIN - I will probably comment on that in a moment.

The second issue examined by a select committee was youth justice in general and the Ashley centre in particular. Again the committee was very ably chaired by the honourable member for Rowallan and again there were many Tasmanians who gave generously of their time to assist members of the committee deal with the terms of reference. It made 32 separate recommendations and shed an enormous amount of light on a very serious issue affecting a small but very vulnerable section of the Tasmanian community. They are all kids, and of course the Premier put a special emphasis in his speech on children and these kids are very special young people in this State.

Following the tabling of the committee's report on 4 September last year the Leader of the House said in concluding his response, and I quote:

'The various departments involved in youth justice and related services are considering the 32 recommendations of the select committee's report and will advise the Government in detail in due course.'

Mr Parkinson - Very true.

Mr MARTIN - So we need to ask what is the definition of 'due course'? Perhaps we need to legislate the definition of 'due course'. -

Mr Parkinson - The time frame depends upon the circumstances.

Mr MARTIN - Okay.

Ms Forrest - There could be a reasonable time frame that could be established, though.

Mr MARTIN - Reasonable due course is what we need to define, because the fact is that many people are very passionate in their contributions to the committee. The committee members were very passionate, but there were a lot of passionate people who appeared before the committee and they deserve respect. The Government's not responding to them really shows an enormous amount of disrespect of the people who gave their time and effort to make submissions before a committee of this Parliament.

Mr Parkinson - The committee before that committee also visited Ashley.

Mr MARTIN - Did they ever get a response from government?

Mr Parkinson - My word. I was part of that committee.

Mr MARTIN - How long did you have to wait for a response from government?

Mr Parkinson - It was done in due course.

Mr MARTIN - This is going to read so well in *Hansard*.

When the committee reported last year I touched briefly on three areas in the report, namely, the education and training of residents, the alternative sentencing and also the issue of children on remand. To me the fact that kids can be held on remand without ever going to court just beggars belief.

I drew the attention of the Chamber to two alternative programs on the outside - Chance on Main and U-Turn programs, both situated in Moonah. Both have proven they can create long term positive life-changing results for disadvantaged young people and have been successful in preventing kids from going to Ashley and becoming a burden on the State Government resources. U-Turn is well supported by Tasmanian police and ex-Commissioner McCreadie deserves a lot of credit for that and I know new Commissioner Johnston will continue to be supportive of the U-Turn program.

But Chance on Main and so many other programs in the State struggle. They get pilot funding from the Federal Government and they spend the rest of the time trying to find money to make themselves sustainable.

The issue of education: I note the Leader responded to a question in question time yesterday from an honourable member on some of the issues raised in the report but did not touch on education. To have kids who are often in Ashley because they are disengaged from the education system on the outside, to have them inside and out of the community, to have them do only 10 hours a week of schooling is just shameful. It is a time that could be used to turn these kids' lives around so they would not continue to be a burden on the community and on the State Government. What we need is a whole-of-government response between education and health. That is why we are all desperate to see some response from the Government on these issues.

A number of honourable members have mentioned in this debate that a lot of work goes into a select committee report, a lot of taxpayer's money, and it would be good to see the 'due course' be a little bit shorter. I think it is a matter of respect that the State Government owes to the members of this Parliament that serve on committees. But, more importantly, I think the Government owes respect to the ordinary Tasmanians who have contributed their time, effort, resources and passion to make submissions to these committees.

Mr Parkinson - That respect works both ways, though.

Mr MARTIN - Sorry?

Mr Parkinson - Respect for the committee process works both ways.

Mr MARTIN - Do you want to expand on that?

Mr Parkinson - No, but perhaps it is something you should think about.

Mr MARTIN - Is that implying something with me?

Mr Parkinson - It is just a comment that members in general should think about.

Mr MARTIN - All right. Sorry, it went over my head. Madam Deputy President, another thing I would like to talk about is infrastructure. There is consideration of setting up a body in Tasmania to assess infrastructure priorities and I think I was challenged by the Treasurer and the Leader to come up with some positive solutions so this is one of them.

Mrs Rattray-Wagner - Can I be the chair of that?

Mr Aird - Referee.

Mr MARTIN - Could be. What I am talking about is a program along the same lines as what the new Labor Government in Canberra has done. The Minister for Infrastructure is in the process of establishing Infrastructure Australia and this new organisation will provide advice on nationally significant infrastructure, including transport, energy, communications and water infrastructure, where further investment will improve national productivity.

Its role will be to advise governments and investors and owners of infrastructure on a number of things like nationally significant infrastructure priorities, regulatory reforms desirable to improve the efficient utilisation of national infrastructure networks, options to address impediments to the development and provision of efficient national infrastructure, the needs of users and possible financing mechanisms.

I think there is an absolute crying need for a similar body in Tasmania, because where is the planning for new infrastructure in the State? Where are the mechanisms for setting priorities for expenditure on capital works? Perhaps there is a role for a new joint committee of this Parliament in reviewing such issues.

Ms Thorp - Ah, more reviews.

[4.15 p.m.]

Mr MARTIN - Well, someone needs to be doing it because nothing is being done at the moment. What I have seen over the last few years in relation to infrastructure by this Government can only be described as ad hoc. One year we see the Government spend out on racetracks and football stadiums - and that is no criticism - next, the priority seems to be timber-processing facilities. In the last month we have seen the Government announce large commitments to housing and new hospital and irrigation developments with some additional road funding as well.

Ms Thorp - Why is that ad hoc?

Mr MARTIN - Well, where is the plan?

Ms Thorp - If you have a whole raft of infrastructure projects you want to get off the ground why wouldn't you do a couple -

Mr MARTIN - Because what I am asking for is some strategic approach to the funding of these.

Ms Thorp - So you want the Premier to tell you what he is going to do?

Mr MARTIN - Wow! Light globe! That is exactly right, because the people of Tasmania would like to know.

Ms Thorp - Have you ever heard of the expression of 'an ice cube's chance'?

Mr MARTIN - That really is enlightening. I am asking you, where is the rigorous process for determining the priorities for capital works expenditure in the State? If there was a rigorous process surely there would not be this ad hoc decision making about future capital expenditure.?? How does the Treasurer know what the priorities are when there is no rigorous process with input from all Tasmanians concerned about the issue? Now, is it simply a matter of who might be best connected, when the priorities should be subject to rigorous review and then some debate by the community? This is what Kevin Rudd is doing. What I am suggesting is exactly what Kevin Rudd is doing at the national level. So if you want to criticise me on this then you are criticising Kevin Rudd.

Mr Aird - No. I do not understand.

Mr MARTIN - This is exactly what Kevin Rudd, the Prime Minister, is doing.

Mr Aird - I am not going to engage. I lost my temper before and I should not do it. It is best I sit tight.

Mr MARTIN - Yes, but you do not need a makeover.

Mr Aird - The best thing I can do is ignore you.

Mr MARTIN - You got a story in the paper once before for ignoring me.

Mr Parkinson - Particularly when you are so hard to understand.

Mr MARTIN - Why is that?

Mr Aird - We do not know why you are hard to understand but you are.

Mr MARTIN - Why is that? I would like you to clarify that.

Mr Aird - I will just sit and show some discipline.

Mr MARTIN - Do not just throw a statement out. Say what you mean.

Madam DEPUTY PRESIDENT - If it does not refer to the Premier's address we will move on and we will continue with the response to the Premier's address, thank you.

Mr MARTIN - Some people can say some members are cowardly, maybe. But I would not suggest that. It is a very ? one-liner. It is a bit like throwing one-liners in e-mails and never following them up. Some of which could be determined to be discriminatory.

Mr Parkinson - Discriminatory?

Mr MARTIN - Yes. Do you want to explore this a bit further, Leader?

Mr Parkinson - Perhaps not now, but feel free to elaborate at some stage.

Mr MARTIN - I did.

Mr Parkinson - At a more appropriate time

Mr MARTIN - Okay.

It is clear that the Government cannot have all it wants in terms of new infrastructure but it should have a sensible input into assessment of priorities. I have no doubt that if there was a rigorous assessment of priorities and a careful assessment of benefits and costs there would be a very different set of priorities for infrastructure spending in the State. When elections come around, instead of promises for things that seem sexy at the time you might actually be able to point to what are the highest priorities for the State as a whole. I suspect for instance that such a process would have shown that affordable housing had a much higher priority and benefit than some other capital expenditure.

I am sure that such a process would have indicated the sound economic argument for substantial spending on a much better northern road access for Hobart. I am pleased to note that the new Labor Government in Canberra seems to have provided the funds necessary to advance the Brighton bypass, which I and other people have been calling for many years. But it was disappointing that there was this delay because the State Government did not have the arguments to show that such an investment compared with other capital works priorities justified early funding, and that was what the previous Federal Government was saying.

A process of infrastructure review would also identify problems earlier and allow for some corrective action. For instance, if the issue of water and sewerage in regional areas had been raised formerly as an urgent need for additional infrastructure, as mentioned some years ago, it might have been possible to reduce the demand by limiting new land subdivisions to those areas not adequately catered for by existing infrastructure.

There has been a massive increase in the last few years in property subdivisions as property prices, particularly in regional and coastal areas, have skyrocketed with little regard to the contentious consequences for future infrastructure which is why the Treasurer has had to come so strongly on the water and sewerage reform.

Better land-use planning with an eye to future infrastructure consequences could be instrumental in preventing social distress from inadequate provision of services down the track. Madam Deputy President, once there is an approved land subdivision it is virtually guaranteed that a house can be constructed on a block of land even if there is not a suitable level of infrastructure and other community services. So a further benefit of having a robust and prioritised infrastructure plan is that there could be a sensible debate about the role of debt financing.

A number of members in this House have for years argued about debt financing especially in relation to the provision of infrastructure but these calls seem to fall on deaf ears, especially if you are an economic rationalist. If infrastructure is to provide a community benefit for at least 50 years, why cannot it be paid for over a similar time frame? It seems unbelievable to me that there is this blind spot regarding high social and economic return infrastructure expenditure. But, if there was a clear priority list for capital works that everyone was aware of, there would be a lot more support for debt financing as the cost and the benefits would be more detailed.

I would also like to make some comment about the Local Government Act. I make it clear that I am not being critical of the Government as I do not believe the suggestion to change the act came forward in the most recent review of the legislation. I am not getting into personalities but the simple fact is I think the public would expect an elected representative of any level of government to live in their State and I do not think that that is too much to ask for. I would urge the Government to look at some amendment of the Local Government Act and, if that is not possible, I will be looking to introduce an amendment myself at some time in the future.

Mr Dean - I think it is a very, very good point you raise.

Mr MARTIN - Yes, you should be living in the State.

The final thing, Madam Deputy President, I would like to refer to is Tasmania Together. In this same speech last year I will quote myself:

'Tasmania Together was the vision for the Tasmanian community and it was supposed to be the vision for the State Government. In my reply to the budget speech I made mention of the fact that for the first time since Tasmania Together was implemented there was no mention in the budget speech of Tasmania Together. The honourable Treasurer responded to that by saying that it was a mere oversight and he would make sure that it never happened again. He reassured me that it was certainly a significant factor in the setting of the Budget. Therefore I probably had an expectation that in the state of the State speech I would see at least one mention of Tasmania Together but, no, it is not the case. There is not a mention.'

That was last year.

The really good news - and I congratulate the Treasurer, he has made good - is that there were actually nine references to Tasmania Together in this year's state of the State speech, and I am really happy with that. Tasmania Together was one of the centrepieces of the Labor Government when it came to power in 1998. We were reminded in our electorate tour of the west coast last week that another centrepiece of the early days of the Labor Government was the State/Local Government Partnership Agreements and Mayor Gerrity from the West Coast Council - and, by the way, some people discovered that there was only one council on the west coast but I will not go into that. The mayor was fairly critical in response to some suggestions made by the Leader about the partnership agreement process, which made me actually do a little bit of research and I am just a little bit alarmed that there appears at the moment to be only two out of 29 councils that have current agreements in place. All others apparently have expired. That is the best I can find out from the information I can access on the web, et cetera.

A question to the Government is why is this? Is it a lack of resources, a lack of perceived benefits - I do not know. If it is any of those things they need to be addressed or do away with the program. If it is not providing benefits to anyone there is probably a lot of money being wasted at the moment.

I understand that a review is being conducted but I am not sure of the timing of that.