



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

REPORT OF DEBATES

Tuesday 31 August 2021

REVISED EDITION

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Tuesday 31 August 2021

The Speaker, **Mr Shelton**, took the Chair at 10 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People, and read Prayers.

STATEMENT BY DEPUTY PREMIER

Absence of Premier

[10.01 a.m.]

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Deputy Premier) - Mr Speaker, I advise the House that the Premier, Peter Gutwein, will be absent from the House this week after becoming unwell yesterday.

There has been, understandably, a lot of interest and concern about the Premier's health. I spoke to Peter last night and again this morning, and he is in very good spirits and very appreciative of everyone's concern. A series of tests have excluded any serious, acute conditions and he was discharged from hospital yesterday afternoon.

The Premier will take a few days off to rest and recover and I am sure we all wish him well for a very speedy recovery.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr ROCKLIFF - During his absence, I will be acting Premier, Minister for Tourism and for Climate Change and will take questions in relation to these portfolios. As Minister for Finance, Mr Ferguson will be acting Treasurer and will take questions relating to that portfolio.

An update on the Premier's health and return to work will be provided later in the week.

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS

Mr SPEAKER - Honourable members, before we go to questions, I welcome the grade 9 students from Hutchins School who are with us today.

STATEMENT BY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Opposition Appointments

Ms WHITE (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, on indulgence, I will update the House about portfolio allocations. Anita Dow will be the shadow minister for health; Ella Haddad is shadow minister for housing; and Jen Butler is taking on shadow minister for building. Sarah Lovell has parks and environment, but that is not relevant for this House.

QUESTIONS

Border Closure Critical Support Grant Program

Ms WHITE question to ACTING PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.03 a.m.]

The CEO of the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Michael Bailey, was asked yesterday about introducing a jobsaver program to support Tasmanian businesses affected by the New South Wales and Victorian lockdowns. He said:

We know that more than half of the Australian population is currently in lockdown. In New South Wales and Victoria, the pressure on those businesses is ridiculous. Right across the country, what we are seeing is the impact of those lockdowns on all businesses. If I was a government, I would bring it in and bring it in fast.

It is clear the border closures are not going to end any time soon and you are going to have to act. There was \$300 million set aside in the Budget for precisely this purpose. Why not act now, before workers lose their jobs and businesses are forced to close? Why wait until the damage is done?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I recognise the hardship that small, large and medium businesses have had over the course of the last 18 or 20 months. It is a difficult and very challenging time. We are acutely aware of the need to support our business sector, our small business sector, in particular, that has been hit hard as a result of our border closures.

We have had our \$20 million commitment and support package for our small business sector across the state. All our members across government, irrespective of portfolio or other responsibilities, are engaging. The Minister for Small Business is engaging very regularly with respect to those matters.

I am aware of Mr Bailey's comments and his advocacy in this matter. It is exactly what you would expect of the CEO of the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry: to support and advocate for their members, and ensure that small businesses are supported through ongoing challenges.

The CEO of the Tasmania Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr Michael Bailey, also supported our Budget and said: 'This is the right budget that gets the settings right. It is a budget that manages spending and shows our strong ability to generate revenue.'

Our Government continues to provide very strong support to small businesses that are experiencing hardship as we face ongoing challenges with COVID-19. When it comes to support for business and managing the economy, I am very proud of our Government's achievement over the last 20 months. We have led the nation in key economic indicators through the very hard work and the strong decision-making from our Government and our Premier.

Yesterday I wrote, as Acting Premier, to the Prime Minister and acknowledged the support that Tasmanian businesses have received from the Commonwealth and State partnership, and calling for more support. The Tasmanian Government has provided significant economic and support packages throughout COVID-19 - more support than any other state or territory relative to the proportion of our economy.

The extended lockdowns in other states are presenting very serious challenges. We recognise that because, as a Government, we have our ear very closely to the ground and our Budget reflects that very clearly, irrespective of sector. That support needs to be urgently addressed and looked at further.

In the correspondence, I said to the Prime Minister that we would welcome consideration to extend the COVID-19 disaster payments to assist Tasmanians whose income is affected by restrictions on movement or lockdowns following the COVID-19 outbreaks in other jurisdictions, which are key markets for Tasmanian businesses. We know that many of our small businesses rely on interstate and overseas visitation and trade. We know that they have been very heavily impacted, which is one of the reasons why I wrote to the Prime Minister yesterday.

As a Government we care about small business. That is why we acted swiftly to launch a jointly funded \$20 million Border Closure Critical Support Grant Program, aimed at providing much-needed relief to Tasmanian businesses. As I indicated in my correspondence to the Prime Minister, we have already provided more than \$80 million in business grants since the COVID-19 outbreak. However, we have acknowledged that there are businesses that have fallen outside the original eligibility criteria for this particular business support package.

As we have said all along, and as I indicated when I stood here this morning following your question, Leader of the Opposition, we are taking on board the feedback from those businesses that are ineligible, to inform us on how we could adapt the current program's eligibility criteria to make it easier for businesses to apply. We are a Government that is acutely aware of the needs of the community over the course of the last 20 months, irrespective of sector and circumstance, due to the devastating impact of the pandemic. We have our ear very closely to the ground.

That is why I am pleased to announce today that the Department of State Growth has now completed that work and will be opening up a new COVID-19 micro and small business Border Closure Critical Support Grant Program on Friday, 3 September. This new program will be similar but will also cater for micro and small businesses suffering hardship as a result of the lockdowns and border restrictions but have not been eligible for the current business hardship Border Closure Critical Support Grant Program.

Importantly, we are reducing the annual turnover figure from \$50 000 to \$25 000, which will allow more of our micro businesses to be eligible. To be eligible for a grant a business must demonstrate that as a direct consequence of the lockdowns and border closure restrictions, they have experienced a reduction in turnover of at least 30 per cent for a minimum consecutive two-week period, 26 June 2019-20 compared with a relevant two weeks after 26 June 2020-21.

Although the program opened less than two weeks ago, there have been 620 applications submitted, 473 businesses have been approved and of those, 410 have already received funds

to a total of \$2 million. I am advised that most of these businesses were eligible for a \$5000 grant.

As the Small Business minister has said, and as the Premier has said on many occasions, we have our ear to the ground. We are always listening to small businesses. We had our first grant program which has been well received and we realised, due to the fact that we were listening, particularly to business advocates such as the TCCI, and we are announcing today, we will continue that support.

Members - Hear, hear.

COVID-19 - Support for Tourism and Hospitality Businesses

Ms WHITE to ACTING PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.11 a.m.]

The CEO of the Tourism Industry Council is despairing at the lack of support from the state and federal Liberal governments. and it is little wonder that the latest ABS payroll data shows more than 5 per cent of all jobs in industry were lost in July. Yesterday, Mr Martin said:

The reality is if you are a hotel, pub or dining venue in regional Tasmania, you are dealing with the same consequences of the lockdown in Victoria and New South Wales as a venue in central Melbourne or central Sydney. The fact they are able to operate and get some trade does not diminish the point that their markets have been completely and utterly compromised.

He spoke of how some hotels are currently experiencing occupancy rates of just 25 per cent and made the point that these are fundamentally good businesses that have been dealt the worst hand imaginable. He is pleading for short-term support to help these businesses through the next few months so that when conditions improve they will be ready to thrive and contribute to our economic recovery.

How do you respond to Mr Martin and the 20 000 Tasmanians employed in the tourism and hospitality sectors? What did you ask the Prime Minister in the letter you wrote to him yesterday?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. The real question is, is the Opposition going to provide an alternative budget today? That is the real question. We saw a lot of complaining -

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We saw a lot of complaining and duplicity over the course of the weekend. They did not know where they were. We had members, Mr Winter and Ms White, out there wanting more money and more spending, and we had Dr Broad worrying about debt

levels. We are interested in the alternative plan from Labor today. You have been in opposition for nearly eight years and not a single alternative budget has been delivered in that time.

Yes, you presented an alternative election manifesto, which was rejected by the people of Tasmania but, interestingly, only provided \$7 million worth of costings. Our Budget is \$7 billion. Those opposite could have at least provided an alternative and stop whingeing and complaining.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, the Acting Premier has the Floor.

Mr WINTER - Point of order, Mr Speaker. Standing order 45 - relevance. We have businesses in Tasmania watching this right now and wanting to know the answer to the question asked.

Mr SPEAKER - Members opposite know that is not a point of order. There is a lot of lenience given in the presentation of the question. There is also lenience given to the answer. I am sure the Acting Premier is getting around to answer the specifics of the question.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It is important to highlight the fact that the Leader of the Opposition needs to provide an alternative budget and a clear plan for the Tasmanian people. Last week the Treasurer tabled a comprehensive budget for very challenging and difficult times - a Budget for the times to secure Tasmania's future. Just today we have detailed in my first answer to the question, support for a comprehensive support package for small businesses. I recognise, as do all members of our Government, the hardship that small business and the tourism sector have experienced over the course of the last 12 months.

It has been devastating but we have been there every step of the way supporting those businesses. Of course, the most important thing is keeping Tasmanians safe and in keeping Tasmanians safe, we recognise that having strong border controls does have concerning and negative flow and economic consequences. We are a government that has, from March, provided more than \$80 million commitment. The small business assistance package has provided more than 21 000 grants to more than 14 000 Tasmanian businesses in response the COVID-19 pandemic, notwithstanding the investment in tourism infrastructure. That was detailed in the Budget.

We have also had a tremendous response for the latest tourism voucher scheme, the third we have had in Tasmania, designed to support our tourism and hospitality sectors. Tasmanians responded in droves to the \$7.5 million scheme. My understanding is there were close to 150 000 ballots registered from Tasmanians, eager to get out and about and enjoy their own backyard and also support local tourism businesses.

We recognise the impact. We have been engaged with the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania and supported them, their representatives and who they represent as best as practicable. We have demonstrated that, not only in respect to the grants that we have on offer, which I detailed more of today, but also throughout the course of the last 20 months as well -

Ms White - What do you say to the 20 000 workers in the industry who are watching this, who are desperate? They are desperate.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I understand the need, Ms White. This Government understands the need of small businesses. That is why we are being proactive. That is why we have produced a budget that grows jobs with respect to the Tasmanian economy, supports a growing economy, and supports the businesses that are doing it tough. That is why we are keeping our ear to the ground and announcing another grants program to support particularly our small and microbusinesses.

Social Housing Supply

Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for HOUSING, Mr FERGUSON

[10.18 a.m.]

Mr Speaker, the Acting Premier's answers together took up about 12 minutes of the House's time. I am simply raising with you that the answers today have so far been very long.

Ms Ogilvie - You didn't even ask for indulgence.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am asking for this House to be run smoothly and fairly.

Minister, the Budget papers reveal the consequences of seven years of underfunding social housing supply. They contain an admission of complete defeat, with the housing waitlist projected to balloon out to 5025 desperate Tasmanians next year. The housing data is the worst since at least 2006, which is as far back as we have been able to look.

While the Budget gifts a sizable land tax break to the propertied class, whose investment properties are skyrocketing in value due to the supply shortage your Government created, it delays the new social housing build and supported accommodation spend until 2023-24. That means more housing stress, ever higher rents, more evictions and more homelessness.

Are you too busy building roads in your portfolio to put the necessary focus on homes for Tasmanians that is so desperately needed?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Clark, the Leader of the Greens, for her question and her genuine interest in housing outcomes for Tasmanians. I know that as a former housing minister, Ms O'Connor is well aware of the need that exists for people on the margins of society and we want to support them. That is why we have the most generous, strongest, largest infrastructure program for housing in the state's history, possibly since the Second World War, if not ever.

The Government is determined to support people during their time of need. There is an explanation for the high pressure in the housing market. There are two reasons. We have population growth - people returning to Tasmania and people flocking to our state because they want to be here. This state has an energy and an economic vitality that it has not seen probably in my lifetime. People are excited about Tasmania. That is very different -

Ms O'Connor - Take some responsibility.

Mr FERGUSON - I was generous a moment ago to Ms O'Connor. It is very different from when Ms O'Connor was in government. Labor and the Greens ran the economy down. They basically shut down the forest industry. We had people fleeing our state like economic refugees across Bass Strait looking for work in the mainland states.

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, standing order 45, relevance. The minister has been on his feet for about 30 seconds and has not gone anywhere near an answer. I ask you to draw him to the question. This matters to people.

Mr SPEAKER - The minister has been on his feet for one minute, 40 seconds. He has an appropriate amount of time to answer the question. He is allowed to answer it how he wishes. There was a lot of leniency given to the question when it was put. The minister has the right to answer how he likes. I cannot put words in the minister's mouth. I am sure the minister was getting around to the specifics. I will allow the minister to continue.

Ms O'Connor - Yes, just talk about people's homes and lives.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, order. The minister will continue. No interjections from other members, please.

Mr FERGUSON - Under Labor and the Greens, people were fleeing the state. That lifted pressure off the housing sector. During this period of economic success and growth and people moving to our state, there are more people living here. They need homes. We are determined to build more houses so that we can provide a safe and secure roof over people's heads.

The Government in its first seven years has delivered big time in housing. Since the release of our Affordable Housing Strategy in 2015 we have been delivering. Through the life of the Government to the current actions plans 1 and 2 - and I have to give credit to Mrs Petrusma and Mr Jaensch - \$200 million over those eight years has assisted 3600 households. That is phenomenal. The Government also secured the waiver of the longstanding housing debt with the Commonwealth. That funding that is realised as a result is recurrent benefit for our state. That is assisting 400 households. Since that Affordable Housing Strategy we built 1105 new long-term homes, 972 social housing properties and 133 units of supported accommodation including, I am advised, 298 in the past year.

We were endorsed at the election by the people of Tasmania on 1 May. We have new commitments which are part of the Budget before the House right now. We are determined to see them through. We are grateful for the support we have received, particularly from those in the housing sector who want to see this housing delivered. There are 524 homes being built right now around the state.

There is more to do. The \$315 million of additional funding towards housing and homelessness support programs is not just about the current election cycle but also about the future. We are extending the social housing building pipeline by providing \$280 million to build 2000 extra homes past 2023; investing \$20 million for new supported accommodation facilities in the north and the north west of the state; \$15.3 million for new youth housing initiatives, including the under-16 Lighthouse Project, modular youth housing and the disbursed Youth Foyer model.

Ms White - What, 2035?

Mr FERGUSON - The member interjects. Well, that is after 2023. That is through to 2027 because we have future-looking policies. For those who cannot wait that long, 1500 homes will be built in the next two years, with 524 being built right now. There is a contest of ideas and so it should be.

In the election which was fiercely debated, the Opposition promised to build the same sequence of homes but with nearly \$100 million less. I do not know how they imagined in that fairy tale that they would deliver such outcomes. Micro-housing perhaps?

This is not a Liberal, Labor, Green thing. Every Tasmanian has an interest in this. This side of the House has a genuine commitment to providing the immediate support that people need today, tonight for people who do not have a safe place to spend the night, for tomorrow and then in the next two years as we roll out those additional homes and social supported accommodation. Do not lose sight of the pipeline: a strong, steady and guaranteed pipeline of new housing stock beyond the period of elections and the Budget cycle.

I assure Ms O'Connor that I can build roads and bridges as well as houses. This side of the House is grateful that we are building more infrastructure not less. While the Labor-Greens government in its last year of office spent only \$27 million on housing, this financial year we are spending \$91 million.

JobKeeper - Taxation Issues

Ms FINLAY question to MINISTER for SMALL BUSINESS, Ms HOWLETT

[10.26 a.m.]

We have heard reports that businesses that received JobKeeper last year are being landed with massive and unexpected payroll tax bills. The apparent reason for this is that the Government is applying the JobKeeper payroll tax waiver by determining what percentage of the business's payroll was comprised of JobKeeper payments and reducing the tax liability by that percentage. However, last year businesses were led to believe they could simply exclude JobKeeper payments from their monthly payroll returns. The Government's own document says, payroll tax is waived for JobKeeper wages in Tasmania. Can you confirm this or was the advice provided to Tasmanian businesses last year misleading?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. As I have said we care about small business. Small business is important to this side of the House. When it comes to support and small business and managing the economy I am proud of our Government's achievements, especially when you compare it to the shameful record of your side. It has been seven years now since you have delivered an alternative budget. Are you going to deliver one today?

Ms O'BYRNE - Point of order, Mr Speaker. My point to you is on relevance. The member is obviously struggling. I am sure she will get some guidance now. She has been asked a very specific question and previous rulings have said when the question is specific then the answer should respect that.

Mr SPEAKER - As the member for Bass knows that is not a point of order. However, I will remind the minister, the question has been put. The minister had only been on her answer for less than a minute. I will allow the minister to continue.

Ms HOWLETT - As I was saying, under the last Labor government many small businesses closed never to reopen, the unemployment rate reached 8.6 per cent, 10 400 jobs were lost -

Dr Broad - She mentioned payroll tax.

Ms HOWLETT - Dr Broad, where is your alternative budget? What are you doing for small business?

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, the minister is on her feet.

Ms HOWLETT - We have been advised that JobKeeper payments are exempt from payroll tax. Dr Broad, can we please see an alternative budget this afternoon and see what you will be doing for small business? What is in your alternative budget for small business?

Budget 2021-22 - Endorsement from Business Community Support for Afghan Community

Mr ELLIS question to ACTING PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.30 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on how the 2021-22 Budget has been received and also update the House on how Tasmania will assist with the return of Afghan people to Australia?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for his question and interest in this matter. Earlier this year we put forward a clear plan to secure Tasmania's future. Tasmanians supported that plan by re-electing the majority Liberal Government for an historic third term. The 2021-22 Budget the Treasurer delivered last week will secure Tasmania's future. It is based on strong foundations. It was based on the success of our financial and economic management over the past seven years and our success in facing the challenges of COVID-19. It will deliver all of the commitments we made at the recent election.

These commitments will keep us safe, deliver better hospitals and schools, provide more houses for those in need and support better education and training outcomes, while also investing in the necessary road and community infrastructure that we need. We will also provide even more support to our important small business sector.

We have taken significant steps through our Delta Shield plan to keep Tasmanians safe and secure. We must continue to face the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic with strong and decisive action and action that is based on advice from our public health officials who focus on keeping our community safe: Action that is reflected in our plan to secure Tasmania's future.

Based on our desire to play our part in the national effort we will assist with the return of Afghan people to Australia. This crisis in Afghanistan has rightly shocked the world and deeply impacted Tasmanians who have had family and friends there and our local Hazara community.

Our dedicated international seasonal worker hotel, the Ibis, will be used to take around 150 returning Australians from the United Kingdom. This will free up hotel space in other jurisdictions for incoming Afghani people. That flight is scheduled to arrive this Sunday 5 September. Public Health and FCC are working to have all the necessary arrangements and precautions in place.

It is considered from a COVID-19 perspective that those coming in from the United Kingdom due to the high vaccination rates will be a lower risk than those coming in from Kabul. However, it is not without risk and we will need to be prepared for a potential case of COVID-19 from this flight. They will still be subject to a negative test before travelling and several tests while in strict hotel quarantine, with negative results necessary before leaving.

We will also provide \$85 000 to the service providers which have already been inundated with queries around supporting the Tasmanian Refugee Legal Service, the Migrant Resource Centre North, the Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania and the Tasmanian multicultural peak body, the Multicultural Council of Tasmania. This support will help ensure that Tasmanian Afghan Hazara community members affected by the crisis in Afghanistan can continue to be supported in Tasmania during this very difficult time.

I acknowledge and thank my colleagues who have assisted with this support; Madeline Ogilvie, the Attorney-General Elise Archer, and the Minister for Education, Sarah Courtney. We will continue working with the Commonwealth and service providers to better understand how we can assist current and future humanitarian efforts.

I was also asked about what others are saying about the Budget. It has been very well received. Business and community leaders have praised the budget. The CEO of the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Michael Bailey, said:

This is the right budget that gets the settings right, it's a budget that manages spending and shows our strong ability to generate revenue.

Matthew Pollock, the CEO of Master Builders Tasmania, said:

Significant investment into vocational skills through the TasTAFE and High-Viz Army Policy will drive workforce growth in construction ... the High-Viz Army Policy will mean those jobs go to Tasmanians ...

The Tourism Council of Tasmania's CEO, Luke Martin, said:

We welcome the funding for Tourism Tasmania to enable us to compete in what will be an ultra-competitive tourism market over coming years.

Community advocates have also endorsed the Budget. Shelter Tasmania CEO, Pattie Chugg, said:

Shelter Tas welcomes the Tasmanian Government's commitment to deliver on its election promises in today's State Budget.

Michael Bishop, the CEO of Neighbourhood Houses, said:

The budget is fair and balanced. Tasmania is obviously in a strong financial position in spite of the COVID-19 uncertainty.

Adrienne Picone, the CEO of TasCOSS, said:

We were pleased to see a willingness ... to do things a different way, particularly around involving people, community members in decision making but also in support to implement some of the new initiatives.

I was pleased to be at their forum on Thursday night.

The unions have also been supportive. The secretary of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Emily Shepherd, said:

I think there are some real positives. ANMF have been calling for greater investment in our community health services. We have seen that in today's budget ...

Mr SPEAKER - If you could wind up please, Acting Premier.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The Australian Medical Association said it:

... welcomes the increased investment in health services as announced in the Budget to help alleviate immediate pressures in our hospitals ...

The Police Association of Tasmanian, Colin Riley, said:

... we warmly welcome the Budget.

I commend the Premier and Treasurer on a very solid Budget delivered last Thursday, supporting Tasmanians to get to work, growing the economy and supporting people who have had some challenging, difficult and hard times as a result of the pandemic. What alternative will be delivered today?

I have not quoted Dr Broad's response to the Budget because time has not permitted me. I believe in a kinder place and have always advocated for that. I kind of like the guy and do not want to embarrass him too much.

There has been a lot of positive endorsement right across industry and community sectors for the Budget.

Southern Outlet - Alternative Solutions for Dynnyrne Road Residents

**Ms JOHNSTON question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT,
Mr FERGUSON**

[10.38 a.m.]

As you should know, residents of Dynnyrne are growing increasingly scared and anxious about the proposed fifth lane on the Southern Outlet which will result in the demolition of 17 of their homes. Officers in your department have told them that a number of alternative traffic solutions have been explored but then ruled out. Residents have not been provided with any information about these alternatives. On 4 August this year, I wrote to you requesting details and information pertaining to these alternatives. To date, I have not received a reply.

Can you please advise the people of Dynnyrne why they have not been informed of these alternative solutions? Will you do the decent thing and tell the people of Dynnyrne what alternatives to the destruction of 17 family homes have been considered and rejected?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Clark, Ms Johnston, for her question. Our department staff, particularly Infrastructure Tasmania, have been speaking one-on-one with residents of Dynnyrne Road, particularly those who have the greatest interest with regard to their own property impacts. They have been spoken to very professionally and with a lot of disclosure well before the public consultation phase begins, which opens today.

People are being spoken with and receiving insights into the plans. The consultation that the Government promised to do starts today, despite the scare tactics of members opposite who do not have a policy on this, or at least an agreed policy on this. Those projects are aimed at reducing traffic congestion between Kingston and the Hobart CBD. It has to be dealt with. The congestion challenge is real. Some members opposite would not agree with that but it is a real issue and residents and business are being encouraged to have their say over the coming weeks.

We know that Kingborough and the Huon Valley regions are growing quickly. As I said last week, with more than 10 000 additional people projected to be living in the region by 2040, already the infrastructure is out of date. We need to deal with that. I challenge members opposite and I challenge anybody who disagrees with the extra lane proposal to come forward with an alternative because otherwise you will leave the residents of Franklin high and dry and stuck in traffic.

The Southern Outlet between Kingston and Hobart carries one of the highest daily traffic volumes on our state road network and it is at capacity. Indeed at times in the morning peak it is over capacity. That is why we are taking action to deal with the congestion with an integrated suite of projects to be delivered as part of the Hobart City Deal.

To be very clear we are not just talking about an extra lane on the Southern Outlet. The member for Clark, Ms Haddad, has been caught out saying things that are not true. I think I have heard it said, 'Just moving the bottleneck'. That is not true and with respect to Ms Johnston who has just asserted the destruction of 17 homes, that is not proposed either. Far from it. While there are acknowledged property impacts, far fewer than that is proposed for

acquisition. That is all part of the public consultation which we have promised as a government that needs to be done.

I would like to be very clear, to the disappointment of those who are promoting misleading statements in the public, looking at Ms Haddad again, this is an additional lane, an extra lane on the Southern Outlet from Olinda Grove, and an extra lane at the bottleneck joining Davey and Macquarie streets. That proves false Labor's false claims. That will be news to some but also importantly, it provides an extra lane into Macquarie Street. This is an integrated end-to-end proposal, which deserves to be properly described by members opposite who have got it horribly wrong. They are misleading people. In some cases they are concerning people who in fact will not lose their home.

Ms Johnston asked me about alternatives and what Infrastructure Tasmania considered. I am happy to advise the House that Infrastructure Tasmania did look at different options before recommending the design for the transit lane which I have outlined. First, the idea of widening on the southbound carriageway, which would have to be cantilevered, would have a greater impact on traffic during construction and there would still be impacts on properties on the uphill side of the Southern Outlet. I am also advised that in addition there were challenges with the embankment on the southern side of the outlet, south of Cat's Eye Corner. The cost of construction would be significantly higher also for this concept as it would require the construction of two significant retaining walls.

The other idea that was proposed was a dynamic tidal flow - contraflow. This would involve making an existing southbound lane -

Mr Winter - That was the policy, minister.

Mr FERGUSON - Mr Winter, if you have something to say about it, ask a question yourself. I will come back to the point.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr FERGUSON - This would involve making -

Members interjecting.

Mr FERGUSON - You are horribly conflicted on this, Mr Winter. We have been through this with you. This involves making an existing -

Mr Winter - We have been telling you for years that it is a stupid idea.

Mr FERGUSON - Ms Johnston asked me about alternatives. This involves making an existing southbound lane able to carry north-bound traffic at peak times from Davey Street to Olinda Grove without any other changes to the current lane configuration. I am advised that this option was discounted early, due to the southbound traffic then being reduced to a single lane, which would cause congestion behind very slow-moving heavy vehicles, the flow-on effect into Davey Street and beyond. The existing wide shoulder on the south bound lanes of the outlet from Davey Street stops south of Cat's Eye Corner so a break down that may occur

past that point would potentially completely block the outlet southbound. Continuing the wide shoulder for approximately 500 metres further south would require a substantial retaining wall on the bottom side of the outlet.

Mr Speaker, I will conclude here. I thank Ms Johnston for her interest in this. I understand the member for Clark may wish to advocate on behalf of residents of Dynnyrne Road. We accept and understand that. We will get the balance right. We are about supporting the whole community with the infrastructure which is frankly now overdue.

Community consultation opens today and it will close on Monday, 27 September. The public can view the designs and have their say to inform the development of detailed designs for the projects. We encourage them to visit the Transport website. The link is www.transport.tas.gov.au/southernprojects. Faithful to our promise, the Department of State Growth has been in contact with all property owners who may be impacted and will continue to engage directly with them throughout the public consultation period.

JobKeeper - Taxation Issues

Ms FINLAY question to MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS, Ms HOWLETT

[10.45 a.m.]

In your previous answer you told the House that all JobKeeper payments are exempt from payroll tax. Full stop. Tasmanian tax agents and businesses are reporting to us that what you just stated is not true. Minister, have you just misled the House?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Bass for her question. Let me make it very clear: Labor has absolutely no credibility when it comes to financial management. Last time around, your side took us into a recession. They blew up the budget. Where is your alternative budget today? Where is it? What are you doing for small business?

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, standing order 45, relevance. While this is not our question, we do not think it is in the spirit of question time to have the minister rise and immediately launch an attack.

Mr SPEAKER - The minister has an appropriate amount of time to answer the question. There is always some leniency given. That is historically the way that it has worked within this Chamber over my time. The minister has only been on her feet for 15 or 20 seconds. The minister has the floor.

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Mr Speaker.

JobKeeper payments are exempt from payroll tax. There is no payroll tax at all on JobKeeper. The JobKeeper program assisted people to maintain relationships with employees and prevent more people being classified as underemployed or leaving the labor force. Combined with the JobSeeker payment and the Jobseeker corona virus supplements, these measures have supported households and business cash flows through the COVID-19

pandemic. The Tasmanian Government waived payroll tax due on wages to the JobKeeper payment program to ensure that businesses received the full benefit of the JobKeeper support.

Budget 2021-22 - Infrastructure and Housing Investments

Mr TUCKER question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr FERGUSON

[10.48 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on how the majority Government's infrastructure and housing investments from the 2021-22 Budget are underpinning our plan to secure Tasmania's future?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, we are securing Tasmania's future. That is what Tasmanians voted for on 1 May. They elected the majority Liberal Government for the third time in a row, the first time in the state's history. What does that mean? It means that the people of Tasmania, who had a clear choice between what majority Liberal had to offer compared to a minority Labor-Greens government, voted Liberal because they do want to secure Tasmania's future.

Ms O'Connor interjecting.

Mr FERGUSON - I understand Ms O'Connor's discomfort. She continues to try to take over this place but they are the facts. That is the record.

As we emerge from the pandemic, on our side of the House, we know that the Government plays an important role in providing confidence to Tasmanian businesses so they can continue to invest and create jobs. What a great situation to see more people in jobs today than at any other time in the state's history. There are 263 000 people in work in Tasmania, with an unemployment rate of 4.5 per cent. That is great. It shows that the plan we are putting into place is working. That is a good thing. It is supported by our Budget, which has been widely endorsed by a range of stakeholders, which is a rare thing in politics. We are investing record funds of \$5.7 billion in infrastructure in the Budget, including through GBEs. It also includes \$2 billion support for our roads and bridges program.

Recent economic statistics from CommSec and the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that our state continues to recover strongly from the impacts of COVID-19, with our economic growth driven by increasing private investment and record building approvals. I am really pleased to advise the House of S&P Global ratings agency which said: 'The Australian state of Tasmania's 2021-22 Budget shows an improving economic outlook that is supporting a return to operating surpluses.'

Dr Broad - Hear, hear.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Dr Broad: your first contribution to question time today, in the first question time after the Budget. Thank you, Dr Broad, for that endorsement. S&P Global ratings went on to say:

Tasmania's economy has recovered better than expected. There are still risks. The labour market has rebounded strongly with employment now at a record high.

That is the kind of endorsement that ought to give members of this House great support for Premier Peter Gutwein's eighth budget for the state. It is a very strong Budget coming out of very difficult times.

I am pleased that there is an unprecedented investment in housing supply, both public and private, and I am very grateful for the investment this Liberal Government is making in social and affordable housing, which I outlined earlier for the House in response to Ms O'Connor's question.

A record \$300 million investment through Tasmania's Affordable Housing Action Plans 1 and 2, and our Community Housing Growth Program, will help around 5000 Tasmanian households out of housing stress or homelessness by 30 June 2023. This includes around 2350 new social housing dwellings, some of which have been completed, with all due to be completed by 30 June 2023.

But there is more beyond that date. The Budget delivers on our plan that we took to the election to invest an additional \$315 million into social and affordable housing and homelessness across the state. This brings total investment over that period to \$615 million through these various housing capital programs out to 2027. This historic investment supports thousands of jobs in our building and construction sector while giving confidence to the industry with a future pipeline of work, which I referred to earlier.

We also have a historic and ambitious infrastructure program that is creating jobs and stimulating our economy. The industry is telling us that its workforce will need to continue to grow because it has capacity constraints. They need to grow by around 25 per cent over the next four years. That is exactly why minister Courtney is leading the High Vis Army initiative by supporting more promotion and training opportunities for men and women to get into this exciting industry; get a good, well-paying job in a great industry that has a fantastic pipeline of work. That is a challenge we are prepared to take on.

Following from our last financial year, where we spent a record \$317 million on our state's roads budget, as I said last week, that is 245 per cent more than under the Labor-Greens government. It is time to keep going.

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, standing order 48. We are now at five minutes. The minister has had sufficient time to tell us how terrific he is. Five minutes.

Mr SPEAKER - On the point of order -

Ms O'Connor - It is 10.55 a.m. We are just halfway through the questions.

Mr SPEAKER - I will make the call when I have heard enough, Ms O'Connor, and I will not be controlled by you. I will interpret the standing orders. We have an allotment of questions that we have to get through. Whether it takes an hour or an hour and 20 minutes, everybody gets their questions. The minister has the call.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Mr Speaker. She may be the unofficial Opposition but she is not the official clock. I will continue.

The strength of our economy and our population growth has contributed to traffic congestion and that is why the initiatives we have, particularly for the southern region, are so important.

I come back to the S&P report. This is a vital piece of news for our state. As I said, the response to the Budget to secure Tasmanians' future, in the main, has been very positive: S&P, the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Shelter Tasmania, RACT, and respected economist Saul Eslake are widely supportive of our Budget.

It puts to shame the various statements of only one group of people who have been negative to the Budget. We are looking at them right now. They are on the other side of the House. Their latest shadow treasurer, their third in just a few months, Dr Broad, has taken on the mantle of the prophet of doom beautifully from the previous holder of the role. It is a problem. Dr Broad and his colleagues have wasted their time over the last 100 days, since the election, in a factional brawl -

Mr SPEAKER - If you could please wind up.

Mr FERGUSON - but, I conclude, Mr Speaker, it is no excuse for not doing the work that a credible opposition ought to do. They ought to be able to produce an alternative Budget and say what they would do differently and, importantly, how they would pay for it. Dr Broad went out and deliberately misled Tasmanians about the Budget and its return to surplus over the forward estimates even before he had attended a Treasury briefing -

Dr WOODRUFF - Point of order, standing order 48. This is way over time. More than sufficient time. It is now eight minutes.

Mr SPEAKER - That is not a point of order and we are wasting more time. The minister had indicated he was winding up and I expect him to be finished within a few seconds. Now we have wasted another 30 seconds talking about it. It is not a point of order.

Dr WOODRUFF - Point of clarification, please, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER - Sit down please, it is not a point of order. I have asked the minister to wind up.

Dr WOODRUFF - Mr Speaker, point of clarification.

Mr SPEAKER - There is no such thing as a point of clarification. The minister has the call. Please finish up.

Mr FERGUSON - Clearly, Labor continues to be in chaos. They are in factional brawling but that is no excuse to not put forward a credible alternative economic plan for our state.

Budget 2021-22 - Tasmanian Residential Property Owners Association

Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for JUSTICE, Ms ARCHER

[10.57 a.m.]

This year's Budget includes funding of \$100 000 over two years for the Tasmanian Residential Property Owners Association. The Budget states that this funding was for the association to 'provide additional assistance to Tasmania's rental owners'. They would be the ones whose properties are soaring in value right now.

The Tasmanian Residential Property Owners Association is not a peak body. It does not provide services, it does not represent a majority of property owners, and it is not the only property owners' association in the state. It charges membership fees. It even states on its website its desire to be 'protected from reliance on Government funds'. Yet, here we are. As recently as last week the Tasmanian Residential Property Owners Association's social media channels were promoting the candidacy of Louise Elliot, the association's president, for election to Hobart City Council.

Can you explain for what purpose and public benefit does the Tasmanian Residential Property Owners Association need \$100 000? Why is this money not being spent in an area of need like helping the Tenants' Union open a northern office? Do you think it is appropriate for a body receiving government funding to be promoting political candidates? Brought in under 40 seconds, thanks.

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Greens for her constant interest in this area. What have you got against landlords? Can I distinguish between - by the way this is a portfolio of Consumer Affairs, not Justice, because residential tenancy -

Ms O'Connor - Whatever, answer the question.

Ms ARCHER - You may continue to be rude and interject on me but you want an answer.

Mr Speaker, the Tenants' Union of Tasmania receives its funding in the legal assistance sector, quite correctly under Justice, with other community legal assistance providers. There has been no greater supporter of the Tenants' Union than this Government, not only throughout COVID-19 but additional funding through the National Legal Assistance Partnership with the federal government. They are provided with federal funding, they are provided with top-up funding across the sector of \$2.1 million or \$2.2 million - I do not have the figure in front of me. Part of that figure will go to the Tenants' Union. I thank Ben Bartl in particular and all his hard-working staff for their contribution throughout COVID-19 and also their thanks and appreciation for government funding, not only ordinarily but also on top of that during COVID-19.

The Government provided significant funds for rental assistance to tenants throughout COVID-19. The House is fully aware of the Rent Relief Fund and the extensions on four occasions

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, standing order 45, relevance. We are not talking about this. We are talking about \$100 000 that went to Louise Elliot's group.

Mr SPEAKER - The question was put with a lot of leniency and a lot of preamble. The minister now has the opportunity to address all those issues as she wishes.

Ms ARCHER - Thank you, Mr Speaker. I urge the Leader of the Greens to be a little bit patient. It is important for me to set her straight on the amount of funding that has been provided across the sector.

The association to which you refer came to the Government for initial start-up funding. That has been provided. Regarding what the Government provides in the Budget, it is appropriate for stakeholders and peak bodies to make budget submissions, as was the case. That seed funding has been provided over a two-year period for that association to provide advocacy from their membership group. Landlords have a significant interest in what is going on in the rental market at the moment.

Mr Ferguson - They are part of the solution.

Ms ARCHER - They are part of the solution, thank you. We need to ensure that landlords and tenants continue to work together, as they did throughout COVID-19 -

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance. Perhaps you could ask the minister to tell the House what public benefit and purpose that money was for?

Mr SPEAKER - It is not a point of order. I cannot ask the minister to tell anybody anything, except she now has the call. I will ask the minister to start to wind up, please.

Ms ARCHER - I did address that in saying that a Budget submission was made and the Government was happy to provide that seed funding to ensure that landlords have adequate advocacy as well.

Ms O'Connor - For Louise Elliot's bid for council?

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor. Stop your interjecting.

Ms ARCHER - The amount that we provide the Tenants' Union far exceeds what has been provided here. Ms O'Connor wants to highlight that she clearly has a grievance and an issue with landlords -

Ms O'Connor - I do not.

Ms ARCHER - and the free market. She continues to want to cap rents. Go right ahead, but the Government will support both tenants and landlords. We will continue our significant support of the Tenants' Union of Tasmania.

I place on the record my thanks and appreciation for them working with the Government at the height of COVID-19 and for fully supporting our Rent Relief Fund both for landlords and tenants, significantly for tenants. Ms O'Connor can continue to gripe about this on the sidelines.

Budget 2021-22 - Debt Levels

Dr BROAD question to ACTING PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[11.03 a.m.]

Eminent economist John Lawrence has accused the Government of fudging the numbers in the state Budget to hide the true extent of your ballooning debt. He said the Budget speech the Premier gave last week was the most deceitful speech he had heard in his entire life. This is a damning indictment. How can you expect Tasmanians to accept a record level of debt when you are not willing to be honest with them about the true state of Tasmania's finances?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for his question and his continued advocacy for less debt. The Leader wants more spending. He cannot have it both ways.

Budgets are difficult to balance. It is a fine line. The Treasurer in his Budget has struck that line when it comes to supporting a growing economy and jobs, supporting industry through tough times and investing in key areas of the community that deserve and will value extra support during these particular times and all the social services.

Treasury is the state's leading authority on the state's Budget and finances, thankfully not Dr Broad. I do not think anyone would suggest that the state Treasury acts with anything but the highest integrity. Treasury applies this integrity when preparing the Budget papers and reviewing the Budget speech. To suggest that the Budget speech is deceitful is, in many respects, Dr Broad, an attack on Treasury. Treasury would never approve something in a Budget speech that was not 100 per cent accurate. Some of the commentary I have been hearing over the course of the weekend, including Dr Broad's, is regrettable. I would urge you, Dr Broad, to refrain from such language. You have also been complicit in the attack on Treasury.

The Budget papers are clear. As ratings agency S&P stated in its media release on 26 August 2021, 'Tasmania is on the path to operating surplus'. The Budget papers show that. The Budget returns to a cash operating surplus of \$368.8 million: Budget Paper No. 1, Table 4.3 on page 47, General Government and Cash Flow Statement, Net Cash Flows from Operating Activities. It would be helpful if you showed some interest in the Budget papers and stopped misleading Tasmanians.

In 2023-24 the Budget returns to a net operating surplus of \$39.4 million increasing to \$126.8 million in 2024-25. Extraordinary when you think about where we were 20 months ago. Who would have thought that with good management, strong border controls, supporting Tasmanians, we would be where we are today? We have done all those things and we are in a very strong position. Dr Broad, you can see this in Budget Paper No. 1, Table 4.1, General Government Income Statement on page 44.

This might be an inconvenient truth to you, Dr Broad. If Labor got into government the state's finances would be a mess. I was hearing figures of \$2 billion extra expenditure. They managed to muster up \$7 million worth of costings among those \$2 billion. That is a lot of dollars short. Tasmanians are breathing a sigh of relief that the 1 May election returned a

majority Liberal Government. We wish the Premier and Treasurer well. He delivered a fine budget last Thursday.

Renewable Energy and Emissions Profile

Mr ELLIS question to ACTING MINISTER for CLIMATE CHANGE, Mr ROCKLIFF

[11.08 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on the Government's plan to secure Tasmania's future by capitalising on our unique renewable energy and emissions profile as well as an update on the statutory independent review of the Climate Change (State Action) Act 2008?

ANSWER

Thank you, Mr Ellis. You are clearly passionate about this question and know a lot about this subject. I thank you for the question and your interest in this critical matter.

When it comes to reducing emissions, increasing renewable energy and fighting climate change, the Government is taking action and Tasmania is leading the way. We achieved 100 per cent self-sufficiency in renewable electricity last year and have achieved our net zero emissions target in six of the past seven years. We know that as the world looks to reduce emissions -

Ms O'Connor - Because of the forests.

Mr ROCKLIFF - You have to acknowledge this, Ms O'Connor. These strengths are not only good for our environment, they form an important part of our brand and our competitive advantage. We are one of the only places where we can say that we have more renewable electricity than we use. It comes at a time when companies, investors and talented people from around the world are looking for it. This is why we will expand our renewable energy capacity and show the world how to decarbonise in big and small ways, bringing investment prosperity, hope and opportunity to people and businesses right across Tasmania.

This is the state of innovation, with a long history of continuous improvement. That is why we have a target to achieve 200 per cent of our renewable needs as outlined in our Tasmanian Renewable Energy Action Plan, and it is why we are progressing the \$700 million refurbishment of the Tarraleah Power Station, which will double our generating capacity from 110 megawatts up to 220 megawatts, as our energy minister was well across.

It is also why in last week's Budget we announced the creation of Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania. Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania will take a whole of government view to strategically capture opportunities, jobs and investment that our unique renewable energy and emissions position provides. It will be a centre of excellence and the Government's approach is towards Battery of the Nation and Project Marinus; green hydrogen; supporting industries to reduce emissions and adapt, capitalising on our carbon stores; monitoring and reducing government's emissions and complementing our Tasmanian brand. As the world transitions to a low carbon economy there is no time to waste, with a strategic change helping to ensure we are better placed to fully grasp these opportunities that will help secure Tasmania's future.

At the same time, members will be well aware that the statutory process of reviewing Tasmania's Climate Change Act is nearing completion. I can advise the House that the independent review has been completed by international consultancy firm Jacobs and Jacobs. Today as Acting Premier and Acting Minister for Climate Change I am tabling their report. More than 200 Tasmanians, community research and industry organisations participated in the consultation earlier this year with a key theme that Tasmania could adopt a more ambitious target to capitalise on our competitive strengths in a low carbon economy while continuing to address climate change.

In line with this, the latest science, the report makes seven recommendations:

- (1) Legislate a more ambitious emissions reduction target with net zero emissions by 2030.
- (2) Consolidate the act's existing objectives.
- (3) Include a set of principles to guide climate action.
- (4) Ensure relevant Tasmanian government policies, plans and strategies are informed by climate change considerations.
- (5) Make the development of a climate action plan a statutory requirement.
- (6) Require a five-yearly statewide climate risk assessment to be completed and include the completion of a sector-based decarbonisation and resilience plans.

They would be amongst the strongest commitments in the nation and the proposed emissions reduction target would be one of the strongest in the world. The Government notes the recommendations of the review and their very clear direction. It is exactly why we announced the establishment of Renewables Climate and Future Industries Tasmania: to ensure we capture the opportunities from a globally unique position.

At the same time the most recent IPCC report makes clear the necessity to act and for Tasmania to do its bit. The Government has also been very clear that any new target must be based on science and economics. Importantly, expert economic modelling indicates that adopting a more ambitious target is both achievable and credible and could generate higher economic growth and more jobs. The Government will have more to say about this in time.

To ensure we get the right balance between leveraging our competitive advantages in renewable energy and our managed forest estate, while providing support and time for other key sectors to transition to a low carbon economy, we will now undertake further targeted consultation with business, industry and the community on an appropriate emissions reduction target for Tasmanians. We will work through the review and the expert economic analysis in a sensible and responsible way, with a view to finalising consultation and introducing a new act to parliament this year.

So, there are many areas that we are looking at in terms of climate action as outlined in the Budget: renewable energy funding; two-year stamp duty waiver for electric vehicles; a second \$600 000 grant program to install electric vehicle chargers in regional Tasmania and in

key tourism destinations; \$6 million in equity investment for Metro Tasmania to trial an electric bus in the south and a \$250 000 carbon farming advice program and support for the tourism industry to adopt electric vehicles by waiving registration fees for hire car companies.

Budget 2021-22 - Delayed Operating Surplus

Dr BROAD question to ACTING PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[11.15 a.m.]

When the Liberals came into office in 2014, the state had been debt free for a decade. Tasmania had paid off the Rundle government's record debt and left you with cash in the bank. Now we are barrelling towards \$3.5 billion in debit, three times the amount of debt in the mid-1990s and there is no end in sight. How can you continue to say the state will be back in the black when you are borrowing more than \$2 million a day for the next four years? How are we going to cram in your election promises?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank Dr Broad for the question. We do not have long to wait. It is probably about three-quarters of an hour when we will realise in the Labor alternative budget the detail as per Dr Broad's question. Are you going to increase taxes and levies to Tasmanians? Or are you going to cut expenditure? What are you going to cut? Are you going to cut the extra funding, \$900 million into health, for example? Are you going to cut that in the alternative budget? Are you going to make cuts to the \$615 million we are investing into housing to create 3500 more homes by 2027, Dr Broad? What are you going to do? Are you going to cut teachers out of classrooms? Is that what you are going to do?

Dr Broad - You cannot have it both ways.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Dr Broad. Order.

Mr FERGUSON - You have to make these decisions. You are the alternative government. You have been around for eight years and Tasmanians have a right to know. You are concerned about debt but what are you going to do to address it? Are you going to increase taxes to Tasmanians or are you going to cut expenditure? Are you going to cut expenditure?

It is very clear to me that Tasmania's net debt is forecast to be the lowest in the country on a per capita basis. We are budgeting responsibly in that we have delayed the Budget's return to an operating surplus by one year. Why are we doing that?

Ms O'Byrne - Shocking financial managers.

Mr FERGUSON - Well, we have \$2 billion more spending -

Mr SPEAKER - Order. The Acting Treasurer has the call. Order.

Mr FERGUSON - I will have to let that go to the keeper, Mr Speaker.

I will only point to the \$2 billion of additional expenditure in what they are saying is the alternative budget. Look back at what we delivered at the 1 May election but at the same time they have said we have swiped their policies. There is a bit of explaining to do on the other side of the house in about 40 minutes from now. I am conscious of time.

Dr Broad, we are managing our budget responsibly for very difficult and challenging times. We have delayed the return to an operating surplus by one year because we have made the decision to invest more in health. You, as an opposition, have quite rightly kept the government to account, including myself as health minister, over the course of the last few months and years in wanting more investment in health.

We are putting \$900 million more into health. We have made these decisions. We recognise the fact that we have delayed our return to an operating surplus by an extra year so we can do that and look after Tasmanians who deserve health care in the right place and at the right time.

Budget 2021-22 - Court Backlogs

Ms OGILVIE question to MINISTER FOR JUSTICE, Ms ARCHER

[11.19 a.m.]

Can you please provide the house with an update on how the majority Liberal government is investing in Tasmania's justice system to address court backlogs?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question and her ongoing interest in providing strong, fair and efficient justice for all Tasmanians. This is a budget that supports our justice system to meet the community's expectations and, importantly, delivers on our clear commitment to secure Tasmania's future.

We are providing our courts with the resources they need by investing more than \$35 million over the next four years into the state's justice system, appointing more judges and magistrates, and modernising court buildings.

It is no secret that COVID-19 has hampered a number of initiatives already announced and funded to reduce the backlog of criminal matters in the Magistrates and Supreme Courts. That is why in this year's state Budget we have included funding to appoint an additional permanent magistrate.

This will be our Government's second additional magistrate appointment since 2019, bringing the total number of permanent magistrates to 17. By committing \$956 000 to an additional magistrate in this Budget, with the supports that are required for that, our Government will deliver faster justice to all Tasmanians. The new magistrate will be based in Hobart, where the majority of the caseload is located, but will also be required to travel state-wide, ensuring that the caseload across Tasmania is managed efficiently.

This will include travel to a brand-new modern fit-for-purpose court complex in Burnie, a development that Labor are still bitterly divided about. We have the shadow attorney-general

welcoming the building of a new court up there and Ms Dow continues to criticise it. On this side, we are continuing to invest in our justice system.

We are also investing \$2.6 million over the next two years to extend the appointments of our three acting judges. These acting judges allow for more trials to be held throughout the year, addressing the backlog and supporting victims, witnesses and litigants.

This investment follows on from our announcement of \$1.1 million a year announced in 2019-20 towards the appointment of a seventh Supreme Court judge. I look forward to shortly announcing the judge's appointment, consistent with our Government's protocol on judicial appointments.

Soon, the first time since 1995, the Supreme Court will have seven permanent judges. More judges and more magistrates mean faster justice for Tasmanians. New court buildings mean better, safer and more efficient justice for Tasmanians.

Our Government also continues to invest in alternative dispute resolution and the administration of justice. We are revolutionising our tribunals with the operations of the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to formally commence later this year, a project that took 20 years to get off the ground. It took this Government to deliver it. This will provide contemporary justice for administrative disputes and cases.

While members opposite remain entirely focused on themselves and preoccupied with factional infighting, only our Government has a strong and detailed plan to invest in Tasmania's justice system. Keeping Tasmanians safe and providing an efficient and strong justice system is a core priority for our Government. Only our Government has a strong track record for investing in our justice system and building our future.

Budget 2021 -22 - State Debt

Dr BROAD question to ACTING PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[11.23 a.m.]

The Liberal Government is racking up a record debt at the rate of more than \$2 million a day. That is \$86 000 every hour for the next four years. Treasury sounded the alarm about the unsustainability of the state's finances in June with a fiscal sustainability report, when they said that Tasmania's debt is on track to grow to as much as \$30 billion by 2035. That is like every Tasmanian having \$50 000 of credit card debt. Will you acknowledge we are not back in the black but we are on a highway to hell?

ANSWER

Did you just do a fist pump to yourself? Congratulations, Dr Broad. I do not have the confidence to fist-pump myself, I never have, but you clearly have in asking that particular question. In reference to highway to hell, I have been learning the guitar over the course of the last 18 months and it is a number that I am pretty poor at. Can I reinforce the point that governments have choices? Oppositions can provide alternatives. It is now 30 minutes, or

perhaps a little more, until we hear the alternative plan. But I will talk about debt for the moment and, indeed, further talk about choice.

We chose to invest in health. We chose to do that, recognising a delay of one year to an operating surplus. There are good reasons for that and that is the increase in demand on our public hospital system. It is only right that we invest in those key areas that Tasmanians would warmly welcome.

I go to the S&P media release:

Tasmania's 2021-22 Budget shows an improving economic outlook that is supporting a return to operating surpluses. Fiscal outcomes are set to improve over the next four years, driven by elevated levels of household consumption and buoyant conveyance duty receipts. Debt will rise as Tasmania funds more health services and infrastructure investment. However, the state's debt will remain low compared with its similarly related peers. Tasmania's economy has recovered better than expected and the labour market has rebounded strongly with employment now at a record high.

Treasury prepares the financial statements in the Budget papers in accordance with the requirements of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' uniform presentation framework. The UPF is adopted by all Australian jurisdictions to ensure there is a common core of financial presentations.

We entered the pandemic with the lowest net debt in the country, holding net cash and investments of \$175.5 million at 30 June 2020. The Premier often talks about this and the work the Government did when we first came into government in 2014 about addressing what was appalling financial management by the previous Labor-Greens government. If my memory serves me correctly, there was some \$1.1 billion of accumulative deficits. We had some choices when we came into government and we had some tough calls to make. We made them, and that is to make sure that we had the money in the bank when it came to difficult times that Tasmania would face one day, potentially. Those difficult times came to us in spades.

Never before has Tasmania faced such uncertainty as a result of the global pandemic. There are reasons why good budget management is important; so you can support the community through difficult times. In terms of 30 June 2020 and our net cash and investments of \$175.5 million, this meant we could respond to the largest economic and social support package in the country and work to reboot our economy more quickly. Borrowings are at a manageable level, interest rates are low and the RBA has signalled it will keep them low in the medium term. Borrowing costs will be around 0.5 per cent of state's revenues this year, increasing to about 1.4 per cent of revenues in 2024-25, far lower than the borrowing costs in the 1990s.

I hope that gives you some comfort, Dr Broad, but we all have choices to make when it comes to budgets and, indeed, alternative budgets. We will look forward to hearing what choices you make in half an hour's time.

TABLED PAPER

Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts - Tasmanian Government Fiscal Sustainability Report 2021

Mr Street presented the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts' Review of the Tasmanian Government Fiscal Sustainability Report 2021.

Report received.

VALIDATION BILL 2021 (No. 39)

First Reading

Bill presented by **Ms Archer** and read the first time.

SITTING TIMES

[11.33 a.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House) - Mr Speaker, on indulgence, I indicate to the House that given the resolution of the House to consider the second reading stage of Appropriation Bills 1 and 2, it is proposed that we will keep an eye on the order of speakers through the day and if we need to sit to approximately 7 o'clock, we will do that. We will assess it as we go, noting that in recent Budgets we have observed that not everybody is taking their full amount of time. The intention would be that on Thursday we allow time for the second Appropriation Bill. Following past practice it is my expectation that tonight and tomorrow night we should not need to sit beyond around 7 p.m.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Leave Denied

[11.34 a.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, under standing order 127 I seek the leave of the House to make a brief personal explanation.

Mr SPEAKER - On other business?

Ms O'CONNOR - Relating to an answer given by the Minister for Consumer Affairs this morning.

Mr Ferguson - How have you been misrepresented?

Mr SPEAKER - The forms of the House are that you needed to raise that issue at the time. The Budget takes precedence, which the House has already agreed to. There is not an opportunity at the moment to raise that grievance. There is always the adjournment.

Ms O'CONNOR - Okay, I will do that. I was slandered by the minister this morning in relation to our view on landlords.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Support for Tasmanian Businesses and Workers

[11.35 a.m.]

Ms FINLAY (Bass) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House take note of the following matter: supporting Tasmanian businesses and workers.

When I was elected to this House only three months ago, I took seriously my responsibility to act on behalf of the people of Tasmania. I could not be prouder today to be a member of team Labor and see the possibility of the outcome of the great work done, not only by the members elected to this place, but by the teams that support and prepare us for these roles.

When I was appointed to the position of shadow minister for Small Business, that further cemented my responsibilities to ensure that we provide a voice to the businesses of Tasmania so they are best supported and served by the Tasmanian Parliament.

It takes courage for a business under pressure to share their story. It takes courage for an operator, a person, a member of a family, to share their circumstances so they can be heard and a difference made. I acknowledge the many Tasmanians who have reached out, not only to this side of the House, but to all members of parliament and to people who will listen in the community, who have shared their stories so we can advocate and provide a voice for them.

Last week I shared stories of Mr Paul Lewis, an independent taxi licence holder from Perth. On Sunday I picked up the phone and checked in with him because not only does it take courage to raise examples of personal circumstances, but it is a responsibility of ours when we share these stories that we check in with Tasmanians.

When I spoke to Mr Lewis, his circumstances had not changed. His ability to gain income and support his family had not changed, despite him not only asking for handouts but seeking the support of the department to change allocations on the weekend, when he may have been able to service the many people that arrived in Launceston for the AFL. Unfortunately, system changes were not provided to support a Tasmanian who wanted to support for themselves and their family.

We heard last week of a number of businesses under the \$50 000 threshold that were not being provided for. I am grateful that today there has been an acknowledgement of the devastating effects that have occurred to this sector and that by Friday there will be some reprieve and the possibility that they will be able to seek support. It is when people are willing to share, when we are willing to be relentless and ask questions and to seek changes, that action can happen and differences can be made.

The other area that concerned me last week, and where we are seeking to act for workers of Tasmania, is the 100 workers who have been stood down at Launceston and Hobart airports. I picked up the phone and reached out on the weekend to a worker to discover that, unlike independent business operators or independent employees who can share their story, they have been gagged by the operators and are not able to share their story. They cannot have people advocating on their behalf.

It is important for the Government to recognise that we need to secure stable work for Tasmanians across all sectors.

I advocated last week for small and micro businesses under \$50 000. That led to a range of business operators, not only small and micro, but also medium and large iconic Tasmanian businesses sharing the devastating and emotional impacts border closures are having. I will share something from a successful business-owner in Launceston, who said:

As a result of border restrictions, there is tremendous uncertainty for business and communities and it is damaging people emotionally. The level of anxiety in the business community right now is profound.

I acknowledge the support that is going to be provided for businesses \$25 000 but below \$50 000. The Acting Premier said that conversations have been held with the Prime Minister to support other levels of businesses in Tasmania. It is essential.

At the budget luncheon last week the Premier himself said there is an allocation in the budget to support businesses doing it hard if it is needed. It is clear, and has been clear. I am concerned at how misjudged the devastation in Tasmanian businesses has been right now. Support is needed now, so we welcome the increase in them and trust that whatever can be done should be done now for all businesses in Tasmania.

I also want to take this opportunity to express my concern for how deeply there has been a misjudgement on the impact on our businesses. Right now businesses need - and I think these are the words of the Government itself - clarity and stability. Clarity requires that policies that are released are clear in their intentions. I want to clarify to the House again that businesses that are doing their payroll tax returns right now are unexpectedly being hit with payroll tax bills.

There was an understanding that payroll tax was waived from JobKeeper payments but, as it has been reported to us, tax agents and businesses are now being levied with payroll tax bills in an unexpected way at a time when the impacts of operating environments and border closures are already stressful enough. Tasmanian Labor and I, as the shadow minister for small business, stand here to support Tasmanian businesses, their workers and the families that they support. We recognise how hard it is right now. We understand and feel the impacts across all businesses - micro, small, medium and the iconic Tasmanian businesses that for generations have served not only Tasmania and our communities and our economy but have served to reinforce all that is good about Tasmania and Brand Tasmania.

Today, team Labor stand to support Tasmanian businesses, workers and their families. We call on the Government to do more now. It is critically required so that employees can save their hours and their jobs. At the point where our next season activates businesses will need people in their organisations to be able to service locals and visitors when they arrive.

We need to do all that we can right now to support Tasmanian businesses, their workers and the families they support.

[11.42 a.m.]

Mr JAENSCH (Braddon - Minister for State Growth) - Mr Speaker, I thank the member for bringing up this matter again, at a very similar to a similar time last week and on a similar topic as well. I believe we are on a unity ticket in our interests in business and our level of regard for those who have operated businesses through this very difficult time for Tasmania.

I also congratulate Ms Finlay on her references to team Labor. A unity ticket over there would be wonderful to see as well: stability in our parliament and a proper opposition. We look forward to team Labor pulling itself together and giving Tasmania the opposition in its parliament that it deserves.

I want to recap and make sure that in this discussion about workers and businesses in Tasmania that we do not forget that despite the extraordinary unprecedented operating conditions of the last 12 to 18 months there are more jobs now in Tasmania than ever before. A record 263 000 Tasmanians were employed in July 2021. Our unemployment rate of 4.5 per cent is the second equal lowest in the nation and, in July alone, jobs grew by 800 jobs in Tasmania. More people in Tasmania have jobs now than ever before.

Since we came to government 28 400 jobs have been created and the unemployment rate is 3.1 percentage points lower. Job vacancies are at a high. There are 69 per cent more job vacancies than before the pandemic - the largest growth in the nation - this all in the most uncertain, unprecedented operating environment that we have seen. It has come about not only through the guts, determination, entrepreneurship and innovation of Tasmanian businesses and the loyalty and the skills of their workers, but also this Government creating a business operating environment in which those businesses and their workers can have confidence that the state's finances are under control. We have a policy that assists and enables businesses to thrive and survive and keep hiring and keep trading through these difficult times.

In total, \$80 million has been spent by this Government on small businesses' survival. We are proud of that record. We will keep listening to small businesses. The 21 000 grants that we delivered to more than 14 000 Tasmanian small businesses in response to COVID-19 pandemic is just the beginning. We are continuing to listen. The Minister for Small Business, Jane Howlett, has shown today again that we continue to listen.

It is wonderful that Labor members have been walking down Salamanca, chatting to a business that they met. We heard that from Mr Winter and Dr Broad last week. We encourage them to talk to more businesses around Hobart and listen to small and large businesses in different sectors and in different towns to understand how the current circumstances are affecting them. It is not the same everywhere. There are lots of different circumstances.

When I was recently visiting businesses in Reibey Street in Ulverstone, they were able to talk about a different experience of the lockdown in other jurisdictions. While we acknowledge the pressures on tourism businesses and those dependent on interstate visiting, there has also been the phenomenon of Tasmanians not being able to travel and spending the money that they were going to spend on an interstate or an overseas holiday on local businesses, on their own family, their home and their hobbies. That has been a boon for small businesses

in towns like Ulverstone where that money has been spent rather than being saved and rather than being spent in other states and other jurisdictions.

We do, however, recognise that there are businesses that are highly dependent on the interstate visitor and their ability to trade freely across state borders. That is why we introduced the \$20 million Border Closure Critical Support Grant Program aimed at providing relief to those businesses. That has been very successful. We have been listening to the feedback provided by businesses that have approached that program and are in similar need. I congratulate the minister, Jane Howlett, for announcing today a new COVID-19 Micro and Small Business Border Closure Critical Support Grant Program with different thresholds for eligibility in terms of turnover, recognising that other businesses need a tailored response in reaction to the ongoing situation interstate.

I also commend the Acting Premier, Jeremy Rockliff, on his efforts to reach out to the Prime Minister to put Tasmania's case as an economy exposed more than other state economies would be to the impacts of lockdown arrangements in other states. I look forward to the Prime Minister's response to his call for consideration of further assistance for Tasmania.

I do note that Ms Finlay has referred to the payroll tax waiver for JobKeeper payment. I direct her to the guideline available on the State Revenue Office website which provides clarity on the nature of the payroll tax waiver for JobKeeper wages components of employee wages and a clear formula for calculating payroll tax on JobKeeper amounts. It is important to note that the payroll tax on JobKeeper wages paid in Tasmania has been waived, rather than made exempt. This means that the calculation of the taxation relief must incorporate the threshold entitlement in the same way that the entitlement is included when the taxation is calculated.

This is not my area of expertise but I understand that these guidelines have been published and they are available for anyone who needs to apply them.

Time expired.

[11.50 a.m.]

Dr WOODRUFF (Franklin) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to recognise at the outset of this motion today that we are debating, the sadness, suffering and loss that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to many Australians, Tasmanians among them. We have all known people, if not ourselves, who have lost their incomes and whole livelihoods. We have all known people, if it has not happened to us, who have lost people they deeply love from COVID-19 or have been unable to attend funerals and special moments with people before they have died because of border restrictions. We have all known people who are living with intolerable mental and emotional stress.

That is not just because of the concern about COVID-19 and the restrictions required to keep us as safe as we can be, but the reality of the other circumstances we are living in. The housing crisis is a cruel combination that too many Tasmanians are experiencing at the same time as they are struggling with a lack of people coming into the state to provide the revenue that their micro and small businesses need to stay afloat.

We are truly in a hard place and it is good to see people working together as much as people are on this matter. It is really small bickies and the least he can do that the Acting Premier, Mr Rockliff, has made that plea to the Prime Minister, to the Federal Liberal

Government, to put some money into supporting people who have lost their businesses because of COVID-19 restrictions. It is the approach of this Liberal federal government that puts people on the scrap heap above the interests first and foremost of large corporations and industries. It is appalling and a disgrace that the Prime Minister has not re-extended JobKeeper to states suffering from COVID-19 lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions that are having a massive impact on people's businesses and their livelihoods.

Tasmania is blessed to not be in the situation where we need the restrictions that Victoria and New South Wales have to protect their populations against the Delta variant of COVID-19. Clearly, the evidence is everywhere and all of us in this place are hearing stories from people in the community who have either lost their business or lost their job because their employer has had to close their business. It pains me to open the *Mercury* newspaper every day to see another story of people, many of whom I know: Doug and Kartika, who have been running the Duke Hotel for years and doing such an incredible job; the wonderful woman today whose has a gallery in Salamanca - these are just a couple of so many people who are really suffering.

We have in Tasmania an opportunity to do more. Yes, the Acting Premier should be on the phone, but he should be publicly calling out the Liberal Party and the approach they have of not stepping in to support people. We saw how well it worked, we know how well it works. Australia practised it under a Labor government in 2008; we practised it again in 2020 under a Liberal government. It makes a difference when injections of public funding go into supporting people and their livelihoods so that they are able to continue with paying their mortgage, with buying the food that they need to put on the table for their children, the school fees and, most importantly, keeping their business afloat so that it will be there as we ride through this.

When we are talking about Australia having vaccination rates of 70 per cent to 80 per cent, hopefully having those rates by the end of the year, would not a caring, smart, intelligent, future-thinking federal government want to put that small investment into communities and to individual businesses all across the country, many of whom will fall off a cliff between now and then because there is no federal government support?

The Greens expect to hear a lot more from this Liberal Acting Premier about the fact that the federal government is failing terribly. It is great to hear that the Acting Premier has listened to what the Greens and the Labor Party have been saying for weeks now, that the microbusiness support was a disgrace and was not available for people under \$50 000. It appears from the question today, that it is available to people who have incomes of \$25 000, but \$5000 is not going to go very far. It cannot go very far. We have been contacted by someone who said that \$5000 will not pay the mortgage past a fortnight and all the other bills that this person has to pay with their business, so it is not enough.

We need a government that is future-focused. We have a youth unemployment rate in Tasmania of 9.2 per cent and a total unemployment rate of 4.5 per cent. Why has the Government not taken up the excellent Greens policy we took to the election, and will be hearing more about in our alternative Budget, for a job guarantee? Why are we not making a commitment to provide every young person with a job in Tasmania? We know that it pays dividends. The evidence is there from around the country.

Why are we not accepting Afghan refugees? They have been such a wonderful addition -

Time expired.

[11.56 a.m.]

Mr WINTER (Franklin) - Mr Deputy Speaker, first, I acknowledge Ms Finlay, member for Bass, for her relentless pursuit of this over the last couple of weeks. I do not know if too many people have been to more businesses during that time, spoken to more people doing it tough, than Ms Finlay has. Her advocacy on this has led to some change today and we are relieved to see that the Minister for Small Business has made an announcement and I have seen a media release showing that there will be some additional support for microbusinesses. Of course, it still does not go far enough, so the Acting Premier has written a letter to the Prime Minister. He has not tabled the letter or explained exactly what it says. The media release talks about the letter as being sent but it is not clear exactly what is in it.

Talking to people like Douglas O'Neill over the weekend, it is clear that it is urgent. Mr O'Neill explained very publicly, and as Ms Finlay says, it is a really hard thing to do. We are speaking to many businesses that are in similar situations but his bravery in telling his story for the benefit, not only for his own business, but for businesses across Tasmania, was inspiring on Sunday. He was emotional, he was real, and he is a business owner doing it really tough. He deserves and needs support.

Not only is it his own staff - and it was at least six and perhaps more of his staff that are no longer on his payroll due to this issue, but also it is the musicians, the casual workers who come in and rely on the income that his business has provided for a long time. It is not only him, it is businesses across Tasmania.

The minister got up earlier, on the Matter of Public Importance, and tried to minimise businesses in Salamanca as though they do not matter and had a crack at Labor for going and speaking to businesses in Salamanca. We will speak to businesses anywhere in Tasmania and we do. We will be continuing to do that.

They are doing it tough and perhaps it was them that followed the leadership and vision of Jim Bacon that started the tourism focus in Tasmania. That has been continued by governments ever since then, for the past 20 years. We have been telling businesses to invest in tourism, to invest in a visitor economy and to make it an important and larger part of our economy. That is what they have done and now they are hurting and they desperately need our help. Yet here we are, still without the required support.

We are without a government that is prepared to stand up to Canberra. We know that the Premier has a difficult relationship with the Prime Minister. That has been outlined in Malcolm Turnbull's book. We have read that and understand that relationship. But that should not stop Tasmania and Tasmanians getting the support they need. These businesses are struggling.

I also need to talk about the performance of the Small Business minister in question time today. Twice the statement was made that JobKeeper was exempt from payroll tax, or words to that effect. Twice that was wrong. The Government is aware that the minister has misled the House. We expect that under the standing orders the minister will come back at the earliest opportunity to correct the record. It is surprising that after the first time she misled the House, she was not alerted to the fact that she had misled the House despite the running around on that side that was going on, trying to figure out how they were going to save the Small Business minister from herself. No one told her it is waived, not exempt. This is a big issue.

Another issue that has been brought to our attention by small business, financial planners and accountants, and Mr Jaensch referenced it earlier, is that the document from the State Revenue Office is misleading. On the first page it indicates that perhaps it is exempt. On the second page - and I am happy to read it for the minister:

It is important to note that payroll tax on JobKeeper wages paid in Tasmania has been waived rather than made exempt.

We heard the opposite from the minister today - that it was exempt. It is not. Some small businesses that might not have otherwise met the threshold for payroll tax are now meeting the threshold and it is costing them tens of thousands of dollars. It does not just cost money but also time and effort in dealing with the payroll tax obligations, as I am sure members are aware. This issue is constantly raised by small business. There is a lot of paperwork when you need to pay payroll tax.

I want to comment on this morning's ear-to-the-ground comment from the Acting Premier. I am sure Government members are hearing the same or similar stories that we are hearing from Douglas O'Neill, from Uber drivers, from taxi drivers, from businesses that Ms Finlay has mentioned in the House over the past two weeks and so it is staggering that although they announced in the Budget speech that \$300 million was available for COVID-19 support there still is not adequate support available.

How many jobs are we going to lose before something is done? Are we going to wait another week or so for Mr Morrison to respond to the letter? Are you going to publicly start campaigning? Are you going to stand up to the Prime Minister and say, 'We are doing it tough. Our businesses are doing it really tough here'? Just because the virus has not come to Tasmania does not mean that the economic impacts of border closures and of lockdowns has not. It is here and these businesses are desperate. The need is urgent.

Could you get more insensitive than telling small businesses struggling today that the July ABS statistics were good. Who cares? They are struggling today. It is the end of August. They need your help. You cannot continue to kick the can down the road and write a letter. Get out there and stand up for Tasmanian businesses.

[12.03 p.m.]

Mr TUCKER (Lyons) - Here we go. We have the prophets of doom. I thought that Mr Winter and Ms Finlay were going to add some positivity to the Labor Party. The glass is not half-empty, it is half-full.

When I go to businesses around Lyons - not just talking to businesses in Salamanca - 70 per cent or more of them are doing really well. I was out with some farmers on Sunday night and they were doing really well. I admit that around 30 per cent of businesses in Tasmania are doing it tough. We know that. Confidence is up, jobs are up. The unemployment rate is down to 4.5 per cent. Mr Winter, you probably do not remember this but -

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Through the Chair, Mr Tucker.

Mr TUCKER - Thank you, Mr Deputy Chair. The last Labor government, before 2014, took us into recession. They blew up the budget. It has been seven years since we have seen an alternative budget from a Labor opposition. We can understand why. Unemployment

reached 8.6 per cent. The youth unemployment rate reached 20.6 per cent. There were 10 400 jobs lost. People were leaving the state. That does not mean that there is not more that the Government can do.

The Government knows that small business is the engine room of our economy. With 97 per cent of all Tasmanian businesses being small, it is important that we continue to support them. I understand small businesses, being a small business owner myself -

Dr Broad - You are a big business.

Mr TUCKER - Small business owner, Dr Broad. You are showing that you do not understand the difference between a big business and a small business. One of the key priorities of the Government is jobs. One of the ways we deliver that is by ensuring small business remains our economy's powerhouse. Together with the many supports the Minister for State Growth referred to, we continue to support small business.

Business Tasmania supports Tasmanians to start, run and grow a business by offering personalised consultative first-contact resolution assistance. The service is delivered by a range of traditional, phone, email and on-line web sites and social media channels. Topical information is shared to over 10 500 people who have subscribed to Business Tasmania newsletters each week. Business Tasmania is also the central point of contact for small businesses seeking support in their recovery from COVID-19. In July, Business Tasmania recorded a milestone by responding to 15 000 calls from businesses seeking assistance since 23 March 2020.

Business Tasmania provides targeted information and access to a range of services and programs to help businesses succeed. The top five inquiries made to Business Tasmania in the last month were: event framework and 100 per cent capacity for seated events, Check-in Tas app, COVID-19 restrictions, requests for grants or loans to start or expand a business, the Tasman Highway closure impact registrations and grant queries and how to start a new business. In the top five was 'How to start a new business', showing that confidence is up. In the event of a crisis or an emergency Business Tasmania is the Government's first point of contact for businesses to register their impact and seek assistance.

Business Tasmania has played a pivotal role supporting businesses impacted by COVID-19. Business Tasmania has delivered during 2020-21 a range of topical workshops and preparing a forward schedule to support businesses to start and survive. These workshops include: brand story telling in partnership with Brand Tasmania; business journey workshops with key partners such as AusIndustry and the Tasmanian Small Business advocate to inform businesses of the breadth of the support services available; getting grant ready. As part of the Government's business program, getting grant ready workshops will support businesses to understand and prepare grant applications. These workshops will be delivered in partnership with local governments and industry stakeholders. Getting tender ready is also part of the Government's business program. These workshops will support businesses to understand the Tasmanian tender process in preparing tenders.

The Tasmanian Government funds the Enterprise Centres Tasmania program. The ECT program is a state-wide network of independent business advisers providing free business guidance and information to help small businesses reach their potential. The ECT business advisers continue to play a pivotal role in assisting small business recover and rebuild from

COVID-19. The ECT program has received a funding boost to increase the number of support hours available for all small businesses. The program is delivered by independent business advisers who were awarded grants for services to be delivered across seven predetermined geographic regions across Tasmania from 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2022.

The ECT program delivers business advisory services to enhance small business capacity and improve the resilience of new and established small businesses and promote growth while offering support in all stages of business development.

Ms Finlay, I am looking forward to seeing what you are going to put forward in the alternative budget.

Time expired.

Matter noted.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2021 (No. 36)

Second Reading

Continued from 26 August 2021 (page 48).

Ms WHITE (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, the last 18 months have been a potent reminder of why many of us feel so lucky to call Tasmania home. Our island status, that sometimes presents challenges for our economy with the tyranny of distance, has helped keep us safe from the worst ravages of the pandemic.

Our relatively small population, so often cited as a barrier for our state to achieve the same economic prosperity we see interstate, has made the complex logistics demanded by the pandemic easier to manage. Tasmania's strong sense of community, of looking out for one another, meant we all came together to do what was necessary to beat back this virus. We supported our local businesses and we holidayed at home.

Our incredible public service, which continues to work so tirelessly, kept us safe. By reflecting on what makes Tasmania so special and by thinking about what we value most, I believe we can see more clearly those things we need to fight to protect; those problems we need to address today; and most of all, the Tasmania that we want to build for the next generation, but this Budget does none of that.

What goes unsaid in a budget speech can tell you just as much as what is said. What goes unsaid are the problems the Government wants you to forget, the challenges it is failing to address, the regions it is letting down and the people it is leaving behind. There was no mention last week of Tasmania's record debt, nor the fiscal deficits that will continue beyond the forward estimates.

Not once did the Premier mention the phrase 'cost of living'. No mention of families nor renters, the people struggling most with the cost of living. Not once did he talk about the wages that are not keeping pace with rising living costs. He clearly did not want to talk about salmon or mining, two Tasmanian industries under increasing pressure on this Government's watch.

Only once did he use the phrase 'economic management' when he was trying to claim it was a success. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Tasmania is known for its laidback lifestyle. It is something we are proud of and something that we should strive to protect but it is hard to be laidback when you can't make the sums add up. Under this Government the cost of everyday necessities just keeps going up. Liberal economic management just isn't working for Tasmanian families. Groceries, up. Petrol, up - up by 30 cents a litre in the past year. Our tough talking Premier said he would cap prices if the cost of fuel did not come down. He has not done anything and Tasmanian families are paying for it every single day.

Power bills up to the second highest in the country and made worse by Government that creams hundreds of millions of dollars from the top of the Hydro. Water bills up, while the Government's TasWater takeover lies shredded on the cutting room floor. Car registration, child care, parking, phone bills and internet bills, all up. Liberal economic management is not working for Tasmanian families.

The housing crisis is pushing Tasmanian families to breaking point. Rents are now the least affordable in the country and over the past 20 years rental affordability has declined in Tasmania at 10 times the national average. The median cost of renting a three-bedroom home in Tasmania is now \$400 a week, up \$120 a week since this Government came to office. That means renting families have \$6000 less each year to spend on essentials such as groceries, school fees and new clothes for their kids. It means \$6000 less to spend on special but non-essential things like family holidays. It means more things have become non-essential.

In Glenorchy, on Hobart's eastern shore and in Kingston, rents are up \$150 a week under the Liberals or nearly \$8000 per year. In north-eastern Tasmania, rents are up \$120 per week or \$6000 per year. Across the rest of northern Tasmania, they are up \$100 per week or more than \$5000 per year. On the central coast, they are up \$90 per week, on the west coast they are up \$85 per week and they are up \$70 per week in Burnie. That is an average of more than \$4000 less in the pockets of renters each and every year.

Working families are being pushed further out so they can find somewhere affordable to live, away from their kids' schools, away from their kids' friends and further away than ever from owning their own home, further away from the one thing that helps their family build wealth over the years.

The average house price in greater Hobart is now \$600 000. It is nearly \$400 000 in the rest of the state. How this government expects any working family to save between \$80 000 and \$120 000 for a deposit is beyond me, when they are paying nearly \$1000 a fortnight in rent, when the ever-increasing cost of living means they are striving just to keep their heads above water and especially when next month, they will need even more for a deposit.

Under the Liberals' economic management, the Australian dream of home ownership is just that, a dream, particularly when wages are not keeping up with the cost of living. Wages have increased by an average of 2.3 per cent a year under this government and under the last Labor Government, they increased an average of 3.5 per cent per year. The low wage growth that occurred under the Liberals, means today each and every worker is more than \$3000 worse off a year. Right there is a difference in our priorities.

Tasmanian wages are now more than \$1000 below the average on the mainland. There is more than \$400 less in every pay for Tasmanian workers. We pay more for fuel here, more for housing, higher council rates than anywhere except Surfers Paradise. People's pay packets are being stretched further because Liberal economic management is not working for Tasmanian families. It cannot be working when work itself is becoming increasingly insecure, when 22 700 Tasmanians want more work, and they cannot find it; when a further 12 500 Tasmanians are out of work altogether, when casual, contract and part-time roles are the norm and when people's jobs are under attack.

Tasmanians should be proud of our salmon industry success. It is one of the state's greatest achievements but is now mired in controversy and Mr Barnett is doing nothing about it. An ambitious minister, an ambitious government would be using Tasmania's large body of marine scientists, IMAS, CSIRO and the Blue Economy CRC, to continually improve what is already the best salmon industry in the world. They would be helping our salmon industry stay a step ahead of the rest of the world and would use our world-class scientific resources to demonstrate through action and improvement to the public that this industry and a healthy marine environment can happily coexist and they would be doing it before it is too late.

The Liberal Government is only interested in politics. This Government's management is not working for the industry, the people it employs, the families who depend on those jobs or the communities they support. Liberal economic management is not working for our salmon farmers or the thousands of Tasmanians they employ.

Tasmania's mining industry is facing unprecedented threats. MMG, a company that employs more than 500 Tasmanians, and upon which the township of Rosebery depends, is being held hostage by the Bob Brown Foundation. The mine will close if they cannot build a new tailings dam by 2024. That will mean 500 Tasmanians cast into unemployment. It will mean a bleak future for Rosebery. It will mean misery across the west coast.

Bob Brown and the Greens are not serious about finding ways to ensure the mine can continue to operate. First, they said the company should use their alternative site. Within a fortnight, they decided this alternative site was actually wilderness. Now they demand a paste-filled solution when they know this cannot work at Rosebery without making it extremely dangerous for workers on that site, so it is no solution at all.

What they are serious about, is shutting down the mining industry. They are like Thatcher in the 1980s. They think these communities, these families, these people are disposable in the pursuit of their extreme ideological goals. What has minister Barnett done? What has this Liberal Government done? Nothing. They are unwilling to back our mining industry and its workers. That is Liberal economic management in a nutshell.

If you need another example of this Government's incompetence, you only need to look at how they are slowly killing the promise of our renewable energy sector. We are in the middle of a climate emergency, as the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report shows so clearly. Tasmania has vast renewable energy resources to support the important transition industries need to undertake as we decarbonise the economy. Here in Tasmania, if we are going to electrify our vehicle network, we need to expand our renewable energy production by 90 per cent. That is a lot of power and a lot of jobs.

Then there is hydrogen, an exciting new industry with the potential to create thousands of jobs and increase Tasmania's economic output by billions of dollars. But as we heard from Andrew Forrest - a statement the Premier has refused to contradict despite being given numerous opportunities last week to do so, Hydro Tasmania told Mr Forrest there was no electricity available at any price. None at any price. One of the main reasons that Labor built the Hydro was to attract industry to Tasmania with low-cost power. It has supported jobs and the local economy ever since but apparently today there is no power available at any price. The Liberal Government has put up a big 'closed for business' sign to new industry and to new jobs. The Liberal economic management is not working for Tasmania's renewable energy sector.

I believe that renewable energy has the potential to be to Tasmania what mining is to Western Australia. I believe that preventing the worst effects of climate change is one of the biggest issues facing Tasmania today but scores of wind energy projects are stalled under this Government, and there is no power available for hydrogen development at any price. If Peter Gutwein and the Liberals continue like this, they will squander our opportunity. The world will move on and leave us in their wake.

The very real opportunity that we have right now to use our renewable energy advantages to attract new industries and jobs will be lost to other states and other countries who do not just talk about it, they act. Yet again, Liberal economic management will have let Tasmanians down.

I have lost count of the number of times I have heard Mr Barnett utter his 'wood is good' slogan but today many in the forest industry are wondering whether his word is any good. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the Government is unable to fulfil its wood supply agreements. It is going back on its promise. What future does the industry have if this Liberal Government keeps going the way it is? Does anyone really trust Mr Barnett to shepherd the forest industry through its current challenges?

The Liberals need to understand that slogans, politics and grandstanding are not the same thing as economic leadership and they need to support our key industries before it is too late.

Small business is doing it really tough right now. Border closures and the lockdowns of New South Wales and Victoria are hurting not just our tourism industry but business owners right across Tasmania who depend on tourist trade. Tourists might not be their only customers but, for many, they are the difference between a good week and a bad week. Yet Tasmania's small businesses are not eligible for any support from the Federal Government's COVID-19 disaster scheme.

Bianca Welsh is the manager and co-owner of Stillwater Restaurant and Black Cow Bistro in Launceston. Her business has fallen by 60 per cent on weekdays. She said:

Many businesses across Tasmania are probably questioning whether they can go on. Things are feeling scarier than they did last year because, without JobKeeper and Jobseeker payments, without that education that the industry is hurting, we are just not feeling that people are really understanding how quiet things are.

Clearly, this Government does not understand how quiet things are. When you push them and what they are going to do about it, the Acting Premier today revealed that he has

written a letter. He will not reveal what is in that letter and he has not tabled it. Unless he does so, it will not be worth the paper it is written on. There was nothing in the Budget last week to help businesses get through the next few months. There is \$300 million set aside for COVID-19 support. Tourism and tourism-exposed businesses are telling us that things are worse now than they were in 2020 and they are not sure that they can hold on. Labor is calling on the Liberal Government to stand up to Canberra and demand they implement the Tasmanian version of JobSaver to keep Tasmanians in work. The Government needs to step up to help businesses that have suffered a 30 per cent or more decline in turnover by offering payments to keep workers employed. Ideally, the Federal Government would reintroduce JobKeeper. In the absence of them showing any courage to do so, the State Government, in partnership with the Federal Government, needs to act urgently to save the jobs of workers in the tourism and hospitality sector.

We believe that spending some of the COVID-19 support fund now will prevent job losses, business closures and keep our world-class tourism and hospitality industries going so that they are ready to bounce back once restrictions ease.

It is not just us who think so. David Peach from the Launceston Chamber of Commerce has said that unless more support is offered 'job losses will be a natural progression'. He talked about the serious risks of a draining of the capability in the sector. Michael Bailey from the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry says:

We know that more than half of the Australian population is currently in lockdown in New South Wales and Victoria. The pressure on those businesses is ridiculous but right across the country what we are seeing is the impact of those lockdowns on all businesses. If I was the Government, I would bring it in and I would bring it in fast.

Luke Martin from the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania says:

We want to see something to get their head above water and keep their business models and structures in place so when the tide turns and the cycle eventually turns, hopefully sooner than later, these businesses can do well what they have been doing well for a long time and get the economy to recover.

Lending a hand to the small business sector now will reap dividends in the future, particularly in our regional towns. Letting businesses fail will cost us all in the long run but Liberal economic management never thinks about the long run. After seven years of Liberal stewardship, the State Budget is back to where it was in the dark days of the mid-1990s, back to the mess that Jim Bacon had to sort out. There was \$200 million in the bank when this Liberal Government came to office. Now, debt is forecast to spiral to record levels - \$3.5 billion by 2025.

Over the next four years we will be spending more than \$300 million servicing this debt. That is money that could employ 3000 teachers to help get our schools up to the national standard. It could pay for 3000 nurses to help fix our broken health system. It could double the budget for the Parks and Wildlife Service. Instead, it will be going on interest repayments.

They will try to tell you that our debt is because of COVID-19 but there was \$1.4 billion of debt on our books before COVID and our debt will keep growing long after COVID has passed.

The hapless Minister for Finance, Michael Ferguson, will try to tell you they are running a \$368 million cash surplus next year when actually they are running a \$470 million deficit - an \$838 million error that sums up a government that cannot do its sums. The Premier himself is trying to tell you that night is day, that black is white, that deeper and deeper in the red is back in the black. The respected economist, John Lawrence, has called out his dishonesty. He said about the Premier's speech last week:

I have never seen such a deceitful speech in all my life. He seriously wants everyone to believe we are going to be in surplus in the next few years.

There is not a single year in the forward estimates where the Government will be spending less than it earns. Every year the debt will grow by \$2 million every day over the next four years of this Budget - \$2 million every day. In the time I have given this speech, the Government has racked up about another \$50 000 in debt.

If you look at Treasury's Fiscal Sustainability Report, it will keep growing for the next 15 years. By the end of this decade, Tasmania's debt will be larger than the entire state budget. By 2035 interest repayments will take up 10 per cent of the budget. That is the cost of the entire Department of Justice and the entire Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management combined, all going on the interest payments on the Liberal debt. That is back to the dark old days of the 1990s.

There is evidently a serious structural problem in the Budget. Instead of outlining how he plans to fix it, Premier Peter Gutwein is trying to hide the extent of it. Liberal economic management is not working for the Tasmanian people today and it is certainly not working for future generations who will be left to pay off this record debt.

Mr Speaker, the Labor Party is not saying that all debt is intolerable. We are not saying it is always a mistake for governments to borrow money. If a government uses debt to fund productive infrastructure that will grow our economy, that is a good thing. If it uses debt to fund investment that will save us money in the long term, that is a good thing. The fact that we have very little to show for it makes it a lot harder for Tasmanians to accept. It is hard for them to accept the idea that all this debt is necessary given the obvious waste going on in government departments.

There was \$148 000 to a Victorian architecture firm to deliver recommendations about a growth strategy for the northern suburbs rail corridor. How many reports do you need on this project? There was \$100 000 to another mainland business to advise on urban development planning; \$800 000 for a report into the proposed hydrogen hub and another \$81 000 for a report into public awareness of the hydrogen industry. All the while serious investors in the hydrogen sector are told there is no energy available at any price. There was \$60 000 for a report into public perceptions of working in the tourism-hospitality sector. These are just examples from the last month but they point to a much broader issue with this Government's budget management.

A few hundred thousand dollars here, a few hundred thousand dollars there, it all adds up. It is all for work the public service should be doing in the first place. It is all in place of real action. That is Liberal economic management for you. The tragedy of this Government's mismanagement of the Budget is what it has meant for the services Tasmanian families rely on. Nowhere is this tragedy greater than in the ongoing crisis in our health system.

The elective surgery waiting list is at record levels, up 45 per cent since the Liberals took office. The waiting list to see a specialist has more than doubled, up nearly 120 per cent. There are now more than 66 000 Tasmanians waiting for surgery or to see a specialist for issues ranging from suspected cancer to hip replacements. That is 30 000 more than when this Government was elected.

There are almost 18 000 Tasmanians on the dental waiting list. Ambulance response times are the slowest in the nation. Mental health care is an unmitigated disaster. There is a tragic human cost to these shocking wait-list figures. It is people living in pain for years on end, a pain compounded by not knowing when it will end. It is finding nothing in the mailbox again when you hoped today would finally be the day that you get that letter from the hospital. It is not being able to work or to play with your grandchildren or do any of the things that you used to do. It is hiding your smiles because you need your teeth fixed. It is the fear the cancer is spreading. There is also a huge economic cost to these record waiting lists. As we heard last week, Tasmania's excessive wait times for elective surgery are costing the economy \$120 million every year. That is before we count the cost of delays getting to see a specialist in the first place, before we consider the toll of our inadequate mental health system and what it is doing to people's potential, before we tally up the cost of Tasmania being the unhealthiest state, before we consider the cost of premature death. That is the thing about Liberal economic management; they only see addressing these problems as a cost.

They do not see that having a proper health system that supports people to live healthy and productive lives is a good investment. The Premier says we are spending a record amount on health and he is right, but we are spending a record amount on health and only getting record waiting lists in return. That is what you get with short-term solutions designed to see you through an election campaign. That is what happens when you splash money on expensive band aid solutions like outsourced elective surgery blitzes instead of permanently employing the nurses and medical practitioners you need to make the system sustainable in the long run.

That is what happens when you do almost nothing to improve access to GPs or to prevent people getting sick in the first place. It is what you get when you spend \$700 million on a new hospital but open just 44 of the 250 new bed spaces while ambulances are ramped at the emergency department and patients and health workers despair. That is what you get with Liberal economic management.

On almost any measure Tasmania's economy under performs every other state. We have the lowest GSP per capita, the lowest productivity, the lowest workforce participation rate and the highest proportion of the population receiving income support payments. While there are no silver bullets, education is the best shot that we can fire. A stronger school system will help students learn the basics of reading, writing and maths. It will help students grow into young adults and learn the life skills they need to thrive in the world. A strong TAFE system will help thousands of Tasmanians get the skills they need to get a foot in the door, not just to a good job but to a good career. It will help adults continue to expand and update their skills

throughout their lives and it will help industry find the skilled workers it needs to grow in the future.

Getting our education system right is the best thing that we can do for workforce productivity, to improve the performance, competitiveness and complexity of our businesses and to lift our woefully low workforce participation rate.

When it comes to our school system the Liberal Government is letting us down. Student results in Tasmania are the worst of any state across every age group in reading, the second worst in every age group in writing, the worst in every age group in spelling, the worst in every age group in grammar and punctuation, and the worst in years 5, 7 and 9 in numeracy. Since NAPLAN began in 2008 Tasmania's performance has gone backwards in 14 of the 20 indicators across years 3, 5, 7 and 9. We are performing worse than any state and we are falling further behind under the Liberals.

Teachers are some of the most underappreciated people in Tasmania. Every day they take on one of the greatest responsibilities in our society, educating our children. Yet in Tasmania teachers are given higher workloads and paid less than teachers interstate. Our teachers cannot work any harder or do more to care passionately about their students, but the education system under the Liberals is not working because Tasmanian students simply are not getting the basics. We need to focus on reading, writing and maths before and above everything else. We need to put our resources where we need them most - in classrooms, teaching kids to read, write, do maths and engage with the rest of the curriculum.

These foundational skills are the building blocks students need to go onto further education, to succeed in the workplace and to thrive in the real world. Tasmania could add to its many advantages by addressing its most serious disadvantages. By improving our education system, we can lift our productivity, lift our workforce participation and grow our economy. We could give Tasmania's young people opportunities their parents never had. Instead the Government is failing to invest sufficiently in our school system or to reform it so that students get the basic skills that they need to thrive. This is damaging, not just for our young people, but to our state's economic future. A second-rate education system today means a second-rate economy tomorrow. Failing to recognise that has been a hallmark of the Government's economic management.

If only the Liberals were bringing the same amount of energy to improving our school system as they are to tearing down our TAFE system. In the whole time that I have been in parliament I have not seen a policy so ill-advised, so wrong-headed, so likely to create nothing but inertia and as fundamentally unfair as this one. Peter Gutwein says it is all about flexibility, but the flexibility he wants is the flexibility to sack teachers, the flexibility to cut courses, to close campuses and jack up student fees. We are not going to allow that to happen. We want TasTAFE to be the best TAFE in the country. We want every parent in Tasmania to understand that a TAFE qualification is just as valuable as a university degree. We want students to see a career in the trades as a ticket to a great future. Peter Gutwein wants it to be a penny-pinching low-quality money spinner -

Mr SPEAKER - That is the Premier. Show some respect to the position. It is the Premier when you are recognising -

Ms WHITE - Thank you Mr Speaker. Liberal economic management is not going to work for TasTAFE. It is certainly not going to work for students, their parents who want to see them succeed, or for the businesses that hope one day to give them a job. Liberal economic management does not work.

The Budget has confirmed the Government will not deliver on the infrastructure project they promised Tasmanians just a few short months ago. The \$650 million of election promises will not be delivered. That is 2000 new homes promised and just 640 funded in the next four years. It is a cruel deception with more than 4200 families stuck on the waiting list for public housing. I think it is more than that now. With this Government's record, who knows if they will even deliver on that? It is the promise of new mental health beds at the Launceston and North-West Regional Hospitals that will not be delivered in this term of Government, while patients lurch from crisis to crisis and families despair at the lack of support.

The Liberals have proven time and again that they are incapable of delivering the important infrastructure that Tasmania needs. Delays replacing the *Spirit of Tasmania* vessels are costing the tourism industry hundreds of millions of dollars. There has been no progress on the Bridgewater Bridge, no action on crucial Devonport and Burnie port upgrades, nothing at Mac Point, except a fire pit fuelled with public money, and endless traffic jams are stretching out the working day for far too many Tasmanians. Expenditure of \$650 million will go a long way to fixing these problems but we will not see it because Liberal economic management does not deliver.

It is not only infrastructure where this Government has failed to keep up its end of the bargain. In the lead-up to the 2018 election, the Liberal Party pledged that by 2020, Tasmanian students would be at or above the national average in reading, writing and maths. Unfortunately for our young people, this is another broken promise, with Tasmania languishing at the bottom across almost every indicator.

In the lead-up to the 2014 election, the Liberal Party pledged that by 2025, Tasmania would be the healthiest state in the nation. Seven years in and there is no sign that this promise will be kept, with health waiting lists blowing out to record levels and no targeted action on preventative health.

In the lead-up to the 2014 election, the Liberal Party pledged to make Tasmania's planning system faster, fairer, simpler and cheaper. I do not think you would have much luck finding anyone who agrees that promise has been kept.

The Liberals' biggest broken promise is that they will be good economic managers. Good economic managers ensure the basics are taken care of first. Good economic managers do not waste money and ensure there is enough left over for a rainy day. Good economic managers make smart investments in productive infrastructure that will grow our economy tomorrow. Good economic managers invest in all people to ensure they are able to reach their full potential. Good economic managers have a vision for the economy of the future. This Government and this Budget do none of that because Premier Peter Gutwein and his Government are not good economic managers.

Tasmania finds itself at a crossroads. We can continue the way we are going, continue to see the costs of everything soar while wages stay the same, continue to sit back while rents

get further out of control and continue to do nothing while the dream of home ownership gets further out of reach of ordinary Tasmanian families.

We can continue to paper over the cracks in our health system, continue to have the worst-performing education system of any state, continue with the Government's plan to turn TAFE into a business and continue to limit the potential of our people.

We can continue to fight over our most incredible industries and do nothing to back the workers they employ, continue to think an action plan is the same thing as action, continue to leave small businesses to deal with the COVID-19 downturn on their own.

We can continue with the fiction that the Budget is back in the black and continue to rack up a debt at a rate of \$2 million a day, continue all the way back to the mid-1990s.

We can continue to accept a government that never delivers the roads, the schools, the hospitals and the public transport support infrastructure it says it will, continue to accept potholes, congestion and delays.

We can continue to accept Liberal economic management but we can do so much better. I believe there is another path for Tasmania, a path to a future where Tasmanians do not have to scrimp and save just to afford the very basics, where they can afford to rent a house at an affordable price, buy a house of their own in good time and feel confident that their kids will be able to buy a house one day too.

A future where we have an education system that is the equal of those found in the rest of the country and where the result of this is a community that is confident and an economy that is the equal of the nation.

An economy that supports a strong and dynamic small business sector, a diverse and thriving industrial base. A modern economy that seizes the vast opportunities currently available to Tasmania, that delivers a better standard of living for all Tasmanians in a society that is fair, respectful and inclusive.

I want our children to be proud of what we do right now to make sure they have a bright future here in our state. They are who I think about. It is what I hear every parent, every grandparent, every uncle and every aunt talk about. They want their kids to have every opportunity and to have a better life than they had. What better motivation could any of us need?

Mr Speaker, Labor is determined to make sure that all Tasmanians get a fair go and that our economy is working for them and their future. Over the next four years, we will be working hard each and every day to ensure that their priorities become the Government's priorities because Tasmanians deserve nothing less.

[12.45 p.m.]

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Deputy Premier) - Mr Speaker, last year I spoke of 2020 being a year like no other, the year COVID-19 presented challenges that we had never had to deal with before. We faced these challenges together. The 2021-22 Budget is forward-looking for investing in initiatives that will provide further opportunities for Tasmanians, opportunities that will secure Tasmania's future.

We recognise that despite significant investments in health, we need to build on what we started. This Budget demonstrates our commitment to address the increasing demand and the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. Our 2021-22 Tasmanian Budget continues to prioritise health with a record \$10.7 billion investment over the next four years. That is \$900 million more for our health system than last year's budget to ensure Tasmanians get the right health care in the right place at the right time.

Submissions to Our Healthcare Future told us we need to focus on better community care, infrastructure, the workforce, strengthening the consumer and clinical voice in our planning and the need for greater emphasis on ill-health prevention. Our long-term plan for health care in Tasmania will be co-designed and evidence-based, including the voices of both clinicians and consumers to address Tasmania's current and future health needs.

We are taking a holistic approach to health care. Our Budget includes \$27.5 million to make permanent a statewide community rapid response service and to pilot other hospital-in-the-home services. There is also an additional \$5 million for our GP after-hours support initiative, taking the total to \$8 million to enable more GP clinics and pharmacies to support people in their local communities after-hours, providing more options for treatment and taking pressure off our hospitals.

To deliver care sooner for Tasmanians, we have established a \$20 million fund to enable private hospitals to better support our public hospitals to manage growing demand. We are investing an additional \$8 million into community-based healthcare initiatives to support the Cancer Council Tasmania, GP Assist, Epilepsy Tasmania, the Hobart District Nurses and palliative care clinical nurse educators.

We recognise the important role that digital technologies can play in improving patient care, provide better data on patient management and reducing a reliance on manual processes. That is why our Budget includes a \$15 million downpayment to start progressing key focus areas of a 10-year digital health and transformation plan currently under development.

This funding will also facilitate a pilot project to allow GPs appropriate access to medical information about patients and their care held by the Tasmanian Health Service so that patients only have to tell their story once.

We acknowledge there will always be need for more acute care. An additional \$198 million will help meet increasing demand placed on our major hospitals and enable us to bring forward the opening of beds. This includes the staged opening of more than 50 additional permanent beds across the state in 2021.

We will employ up to 280 additional full-time equivalent health staff, including nurses, doctors, allied health staff and hospital support staff, as well as invest \$15.7 million to support the implementation of Health Workforce 2040, which will be released in coming weeks.

The greatest asset in our health system is our people and I want the Tasmanian Health Service to be considered a workplace of choice, where everyone feels valued, staff are recognised and individuals feel empowered to make positive changes, and are given opportunities for growth. We are providing \$5 million to support and encourage positive work environments across our health system, including mental health services.

We also acknowledge the need to improve ambulance response times. We are delivering on our plan to support Ambulance Tasmania with an additional \$40.8 million over four years to recruit more paramedics. This includes funding for 24 additional paramedic crews in Launceston and Hobart, as well as three new paramedics for Sheffield, Dodges Ferry, Campbell Town and New Norfolk, two paramedics for St Helens, the west coast and the north-east. It also includes the permanent placement of two paramedics in Swansea, Miena and Bruny Island.

We are also providing \$9 million to upgrade Ambulance Tasmania's vehicle fleet with around 30 new ambulances equipped with best practice paramedic systems and built refurbished and fitted out in Tasmania. We are investing an extra \$4.3 million for the construction of the Burnie Ambulance Station and for the Glenorchy Ambulance Station. This is in addition to the \$6 million already committed.

We are delivering our plan to build modern health infrastructure that will provide the very best facilities and equipment to care for patients. Our Budget allocates around \$524 million over four years in capital and investment, including for significant redevelopments at our major hospitals, much needed mental health projects and important regional and rural facilities. We are delivering \$215.5 million across the Royal Hobart Hospital as part of our new 30-year master plan for the Royal Hobart Hospital precinct, which includes the expansion of the Emergency Department and Intensive Care Unit.

Major redevelopments are also supported in the north with \$66.5 million towards the Launceston General Hospital redevelopment, stage 1. Stage 1 is due for completion in 2024 with funding of \$500 million allocated from 2025-26 to deliver stage 2 to completion in 2031. An additional \$12 million will enable the commencement of a mental health precinct as part of stage 2 due for completion in 2027, which represents the initial works associated with the next stage of the 10-year LGH redevelopment master plan.

Funding for the broader stage 2 development of the LGH will also fund around \$500 million from 2025-26 to deliver the next stages of the LGH master plan. In the north west \$41.1 million has also been invested in the Mersey Community Hospital to improve theatre facilities and increase bed capacity. Major works are also planned for the North-West Regional Hospital with \$20 million towards total funding of \$40 million for stage 1 of a new mental health precinct adjacent to the North-West regional Hospital to replace the aging Spencer Clinic.

This new contemporary facility will be a hub for the delivery of integrated mental health services in the north west with stage 1 to be completed in 2025-26. Our hospitals will be further supported with a \$20 million fund to replace and upgrade critical hospital equipment. Stage 2 of the Kingston Health Centre will deliver more community health facilities for the growing region with \$10 million allocated in the 2021-22 Budget as part of the total \$30 million. There is also funding for upgrades to the Midland Multipurpose Health Centre and Dover Medical Centre and towards new helipads at the Esperance Multipurpose Centre and St Helen's District Hospital, to boost our aeromedical capabilities.

Our strong plan for integrated mental health and wellbeing services is vital to secure Tasmania's future. We are delivering on our commitments to increase mental health capacity with \$17.4 million towards the completion of 27 new mental health beds across the Peacock and St John's Parks sites and \$10 million for the St John's Park Eating Disorders Treatment Centre. Our successful housing and accommodation support initiative, otherwise known as

HASI, will now become permanent with \$2.1 million in additional funding over four years enabling this crucial program to continue.

To ensure the best possible support and outcomes for young Tasmanians facing mental health challenges, the Budget includes \$41.2 million to fully fund the Government's response to phases 1 and 2 of a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, CAMHS review report and recommendations that they released last year. These reforms will support changes to the way CAMHS responds to demand and will enable CAMHS to build stronger partnerships and linkages with other services and Government agencies. Our Budget also includes additional funding of \$8.8 million to continue the broader roll out of a Tasmanian mental health reform program across the state. We are also investing in a mental health hospital in the home pilot in the north west with over \$8.5 million over two years to enable people who may have otherwise been hospitalised to receive intensive, short-term support in their own home.

The 2021-22 budget includes \$5.1 million for an emergency mental health co-response team pilot where mental health clinicians travel with police and ambulance officers to attend mental-health specific triple zero calls. Based on a very successful program interstate, this will mean patients will get faster access to appropriate mental health support while also reducing avoidable hospital admissions.

We recognise that keeping Tasmanians healthy is the best way over the longer term to reduce pressure in a sustained way on our health system. That sort of generational change will take time but it is important we start now by putting a greater focus on ill-health prevention and wellbeing. That is why the Budget also includes a major investment of \$20 million to prioritise prevention and early intervention and empower Tasmanians to improve their own health.

We have a strong plan to provide better health care for all Tasmanians and this Budget provides the funding to deliver it. We are committed to continuing to increase access to services for alcohol and drug addiction, which is why we are investing \$10 million into treatment services. This funding will support 65 residential rehabilitation beds, the peak body for the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Council and other community-based organisations including the Drug Education Network, Holyoake Alcohol and Drug Foundation and the Salvation Army's Friday and Saturday night street teams.

We are also prioritising ill-health prevention, early intervention and empowering Tasmanians to improve their own health and wellbeing. Our \$20 million investment includes \$4.5 million to trial three Tasmanian community health and wellbeing networks at Ulverstone, Huonville and Scottsdale; an additional \$4 million for the next iteration of the Healthy Tasmania Strategic plan, taking our total investment over five years to \$10 million; \$8 million for the Healthy Tasmania Fund Grants program; and \$1 million for the Youth Smoking Prevention package to target young smokers before they light up for the first time.

As well as continuing to support many of the fantastic programs delivered by community organisations, we are building on these supports by delivering over \$10 million to build strong and resilient communities. Our Budget includes continued peak funding with indexation as well as several key initiatives which encourage collaboration between the industry and government as we respond to the ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19.

We acknowledge that while we continue to face the pandemic, many face the daily challenge of making ends meet, of getting food on the table, and we have delivered our long-term plan with Tasmania's Food Relief to Food Resilience strategy. Our Budget includes nearly \$5 million to increase emergency food relief and food security funding to extend our school lunch pilot to 30 schools and increase funding to Gran's Van, to Louie's Van, and Mission Beat.

We are backing our strong working partnership with TasCOSS with \$3.3 million over three years to assist with workforce priorities and to meet the industry projections of an additional 4000 jobs by 2024. Our Budget also includes a \$300 000 investment to build our vital volunteer workforce through a new Youth Volunteer Army which will help Volunteering Tasmania rebuild the volunteer workforce as well as helping to connect generations through learning new skills and encouraging participation.

We are also investing \$125 000 to enable the Council of the Ageing (COTA) to commence consultation on the review of our Active Ageing Plan 2017-22; and \$880 000 to continue supporting our Respect and Protect Older Tasmanians.

Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2021 (No. 36)

Second Reading

Resumed from above.

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Deputy Premier) - Mr Speaker, I will continue with my Budget reply 2021-22.

We are also investing \$125 000 to enable Council of the Ageing to commence consultation on the review of our Active Ageing Strategy 2017-22; \$880 000 to continue support our Respect and Protect Older Tasmanians; Tasmania's Elder Abuse Strategy 2019-22, which includes funding for the Tasmanian Elder Abuse Helpline service.

We have increased the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association's grants program to \$175 000. It was fantastic to be at their annual general meeting just a few weeks ago in Longford. Over the next three years we are increasing that program. We have invested an additional \$5.7 million into the Neighbourhood House network and community facilities including \$2.8 million over two years to employ new community support workers; \$400 000 to improve capacity and governance; and an additional \$2 million into extending the capital improvement program.

A Tasmanian Liberal government is committed to continuing to work with the community services industry to address disadvantage, support inclusive communities, and embrace diversity. Our Budget includes \$210 000 over three years to support community organisations to increase acceptance of diversity, access to services, and participation for LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians through our LGBTIQ+ grants program.

Nearly \$500 000 will deliver multicultural and culturally diverse services and supports including a newly redeveloped multicultural hub in the north, a small business enterprise loan

scheme for migrants, grants for Harmony Week and festival support, funding for the Interpreting Scholar Program, Migrant Job Readiness programs in the north and the south and a pilot for multicultural communities in the north west.

It is through the delivery of these investments we are securing Tasmania's future by building connected, inclusive and supportive communities; communities that offer Tasmanians opportunities. This includes supporting Tasmania's advanced manufacturing sector to develop its workforce to meet the changing demands of the modern economy. It is important to equip our industries with leading edge design, innovation and technologies to improve capability in what is a highly competitive and rapidly changing global environment.

Our Budget includes a further \$5 million over three years to implement our advanced manufacturing action plan. The first of three grant programs available as part of our plan - the Business Improvement Grant program - will provide \$450 000 over three years for our advanced manufacturers to access professional advice and information and to help them adapt and meet future needs of their operating environment. This program will support our advanced manufacturers to build on their existing strengths or develop new competitive advantages by providing professional advice or specialist information.

We are also investing \$450 000 over the next three years for our Advanced Manufacturing Quality Assurance Grants program to support the sector to achieve quality assurance accreditations that will help advanced manufacturers retain or expand their customers and markets. By supporting our advanced manufacturers to achieve the accreditations they need to meet their specific industry or market, this program will help ensure these businesses continue to innovate and grow, secure new customers and, indeed, new markets.

The Business Improvement grant and Advanced Manufacturing Quality Assurance grants will provide further support for the sector with grants of up to \$20 000 available to Tasmanian-based advanced manufacturers with annual sales turnover of between \$300 000 and \$20 million.

Our Budget also delivers \$600 000 over the next three years for the Skills 2 Manufacturing Program which supports the development of our manufacturing workforce to enable manufacturers to upskill their workforce through industry-specific training, which is a key priority for them.

The success of these initiatives has already come to fruition with several key stakeholders already visiting our state to see first-hand the skill and innovation of the sector. It is great to see communities in my electorate of Braddon being supported through initiatives which will increase opportunities for individuals, families, communities, businesses and organisations. As an example, the contract for the build and fit-out of the ambulances and their interiors has been awarded to Penguin-based company Mader International.

Our Budget builds on initiatives already announced or underway, investing in facilities and programs that will provide benefits for not only those in local communities, but to attract more visitors to our regions, which have so much to offer.

We are investing \$10 million to provide new and improved recreational driving opportunities across the west coast as well as \$1 million for the Strahan waterfront precinct and

\$600 000 each for the West Coast Heritage Centre and the Horsetail Falls walk. We are investing \$1 million for the Hobart to King Island and Flinders Island flight subsidies, \$36 million for state road upgrades in the north-west and west coast region and nearly \$100 000 for the Don River Railway.

As well as investments in health services for the people of Braddon, it is great to see investments into the next generation as well. It gives me great confidence to see \$26.6 million for six new Child and Family Learning Centres statewide, including West Ulverstone and Waratah-Wynyard, \$7.1 million for the Montello Primary School redevelopment, \$15.5 million to construct a brand new purpose-built north-west support school including a hydrotherapy pool, and \$1.6 million to provide upgrades at the North West Support School in Burnie.

Our budget includes \$4.6 million as part of the final stage of the redevelopment of the Devonport High School and the Latrobe High School. The Penguin District School and Parklands High School, are being redeveloped and more recently Smithton. There are a number of schools in my electorate and right around Tasmania that we have invested solidly in over the course of the past seven years of which we are proud. More recently, we opened a new kindergarten facility at Spreyton Primary School, which was terrific to see.

Investments such as these are securing our future. I thank the people of Braddon for their confidence in endorsing me to represent them, once again, as I have done for a number of years now. I am proud to travel through my electorate and represent the constituents with whom I have worked so closely. It is great that this Budget is not only providing for all Tasmanians but the provision for people across the north and north-west coast, including King Island. I would not be here today if not for the people of Braddon having the confidence in me to deliver what we committed to and promised.

The confidence in the Tasmanian Liberal Government is to deliver. We will deliver. I take this opportunity on behalf of the Tasmanian Government to recognise and thank the many organisations, businesses and people for their significant contribution to the Tasmanian economy and the wellbeing of Tasmanians. I am blessed to have the responsibility of the Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Community Services and Development portfolios.

It was terrific to attend the TasCOSS budget briefing last Thursday evening. There was a large crowd in both Hobart and Launceston, with good questions and receptive to the investments we have made. I quoted Adrienne Picone earlier today. I am pleased to continue working closely with TasCOSS and all organisations that make up our community sector and community industry. I look forward to seeing the initiatives in the Budget, the initiatives we committed to at the election come to fruition to build stronger more resilient communities across the state and to build a stronger Tasmania.

We have worked together to achieve the position we are in right now. It has been a challenging 12 months. Other jurisdictions around Australia no doubt wish they could be where we are right now, not only regarding COVID-19 but on a number of economic indicators, unemployment, et cetera. Tasmanians have done an extraordinary job over the past 20 months given the circumstances in which we have found ourselves.

The 2021-22 Budget is based on listening to what the Tasmanian community wants and providing support where it is most needed. It delivers on our plan to secure Tasmania's future.

Our Budget demonstrates this commitment to all Tasmanians. I commend our Premier and Treasurer for his diligence in producing, if my memory serves me correctly, his eighth budget. It is a budget that supports a growing economy, the training of people, the education of people, Tasmanian healthcare and mental health and wellbeing as well as a range of services where we are all working together to make this state even greater than it is today.

[2.42 p.m.]

Dr BROAD (Braddon) - Mr Speaker, I rise to give my contribution to the bill and my Budget reply. The Premier gave his Budget speech on Thursday, speaking for 50 minutes. What he did not mention is that this state is heading into record debt. I went to all the TCCI Budget events across the state, in Hobart, Launceston and Devonport. I heard time and again the Premier saying that the Budget was, and I quote, 'back in the black'. It is not true.

All you need to do is look at Table 1.1 which is Key Budget and Forward Estimate Aggregates, 2020-21 to 2024-25. The line showing the net debt is increasing across the forward Estimates. The outcome from last year was a net debt of \$4.59 million. That is the first time the state has had a net debt since 2004, when Labor paid off the net debt of the Liberal governments.

How can the Government and the Premier claim the Budget is back in the black when we heard in question time that the Government is borrowing \$2 million a day? This table also exposes other issues. The Government keeps referring to the net operating surplus or deficit, the net operating balance, which is negative until 2023-24. That is too far down the line for the Government to be crowing about but they do refer to it. It is a wafer-thin operating surplus of \$39.4 million in 2023-24.

We get to the old chestnut that it does not include money from the federal government that is counted as income but the expenditure does not have to be accounted for. If you account for that spending then you have your fiscal surplus or deficit. In this case it is a deficit across the forward Estimates.

You cannot hide the debt. The Government has been deficit spending for years now. It has got away with it is because there has been net cash in investments on the Government's books. That is not the case anymore. We have borrowed money and the net debt is sitting on the books for everybody to see.

Also in Table 1.1 is Infrastructure Investment. We had over \$1 billion projected in the budget from last year and the spend was actually \$400 million less.

The net operating surplus they like to crow about year after year, which hides the true state of the Budget, is not a surplus until 2023-24. In the past they said that they have delayed the surplus for another year - only an accounting surplus, that is for sure. What do you do when even that measure is not good enough for the spin doctors to get away with in media statements? You think of a strategy which is pick the best statistic.

The one the Government has been using is from Table 4.3, which is net cash flows from operating activities. The Premier said time after time that we are cash positive from next year. In his haste the Finance minister, Mr Ferguson, slapped together an attack release against me in which he got this figure wrong. He said it was \$368.6 million but it is \$368.8 million. It is only a \$200 000 error but you need to fact-check when you hastily shove out an attack release.

It is not as bad as the decimal point issue highlighted in the Liberal's pre-2014 so-called alternative budget, where there was a mistake of \$1 billion or \$900 million. Mr Ellis pointed out that getting the decimal point wrong is not such a big issue. If a nurse gets a decimal point wrong it can kill someone. In terms he might understand, if he gets the decimal point wrong when ordering pipes instead of getting 10 metres he might get 100 metres of pipe. Maybe he understands it now.

In Table 4.3, the Government is choosing the best statistic. By picking this statistic they do not need to take into account spending from grants received from the federal government. They get the income and do not account for the spending. That is counted in the net cash flows from operating activity. The underlying figure is much worse. The Government does not talk about the underlying figure because it does not suit its agenda.

In this table you also see things like equity injections. That is the Government handing over money, mainly to the GBEs. That is not counted. If you count that it looks a lot worse. At the bottom of the table are the key fiscal aggregates. The last line says 'Equals CASH SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)' and the cash is in deficit across the forward Estimates. This is the way it is: the Government is spending more than its revenue. The only way that works, because there is no cash in investments left on the state's balance sheet, is to borrow money. The state is borrowing money at the rate of \$2 million a day.

We heard that the debt is better than predicted. The Government predicted armageddon before the last election, \$4.3 billion in debt. In this Budget they are down to \$3.5 billion and pretending that is good. How did they get that result? Some of it was the \$400 million extra GST that was unbudgeted. Also, as pointed out in Table 1.1, there was a significant underspend of \$400 million in infrastructure - another underspend in infrastructure. People are so sick of hearing the Government talk about its infrastructure spending that it has stopped the spin on its infrastructure spending. We do not hear the Government crowing like last year, talking about a \$1 billion blitz. Everyone has become pretty jaded when it comes to the Government's infrastructure spending because, year in, year out, they underspend. Whatever they say they are going to do on infrastructure, they spend less. Maybe this is their strategy to try to bring their budget under control, but it is not enough.

I remember Mr Gutwein's 2020 Budget speech. I will quote: 'Today I am announcing the largest and most significant infrastructure program in the state's history'. He goes on to say: 'A record \$1 billion has been budgeted for this year alone'. Then we saw headlines of a \$1 billion infrastructure blitz. Guess what? It did not happen. The infrastructure spending did not happen again and again and again.

Last year, the Treasurer in his Budget speech, also said that net debt was manageable. This year he spoke for 50 minutes and did not even mention the state's net debt position. Why is that? Is it because he is embarrassed, or is it because it does not fit his narrative? Debt is \$3.5 billion across the forward Estimates and it cannot be hidden any more. The spin cannot be hidden. This is record debt.

Saul Eslake, the eminent economist, said in his response to the Budget:

If you add in the debt of Tasmania's GBEs, the total is larger as a percentage of growth state product for not only Western Australia but also, by a small margin, of that in New South Wales and Queensland.

The Government is saying, and the Premier, Mr Gutwein, says as well, that we have the least debt in the country. The other states do not have the government business enterprises loaded up like we do. If you look across all the Government's activities, we are not in front of very many. If you also add Tasmania's unfunded public sector superannuation liability, which is far and away the largest of any state and territory relative to the size of the economy, then this is from Saul Eslake; these are his words:

Tasmania's total net financial liabilities are larger than those of any except the Northern Territory.

If you look at our total debt position, this Government has run us into having the largest net financial liabilities of any state and of the ACT. Only Northern Territory has more debt than us and you will note that the Premier, in the past, has called them a basket case. We are getting close to that under this Government's watch.

The Government talks about the impact of COVID-19. There has definitely been an impact on the budgets across the world of COVID-19. What is the truth? The truth is that there was \$1.4 billion of debt on the state's books before COVID-19 and our debt will keep growing long after COVID-19 hopefully has passed. The state was deficit-spending before COVID-19.

The Government is in denial about its deficit spending. It is as though they do not know what deficit spending is, so I will define it for them:

Deficit spending occurs when government spends more than it collects in revenues during a given budget year. It typically makes up this difference by borrowing money which generates debt and increases the amount the government must pay in interest.

That is right. The Government will borrow money every year, including \$420 million in the year 2024-25, long after COVID-19 is behind us. The Government will be borrowing right up to that point. This Government will be borrowing \$2 million every day for four years. That is not back in the black, that is deeper in the red. It is absolutely deeper in the red. That is at a rate of \$86 000 per hour. That is \$46 000 just for this speech. That is what the Government will be borrowing. Back in the black? No, it is deeper in the red.

Treasury says that the current track is unsustainable and it will end up being \$30 billion by 2035. Currently the debt at the end of this period will stand at \$6500 per Tasmanian. At the end of 2035, in just 15 short years, it could be as much as \$50 000 per Tasmanian.

The Government cannot hide this debt any more and it cannot spin its way out of this continued deficit spending. Others have noticed as well. Respected economicist John Lawrence has called out this dishonesty. This is what he said about the Premier's speech last week:

I've never seen such a deceitful speech in all my life. He seriously wants everyone to believe we are going to be in surplus in the next few years.

The facts are that the Liberals need to understand that slogans, politics and grandstanding are not the same as economic leadership. This is the Liberals' eighth state budget and Tasmania is back where we were in the dark days of the mid-1990s debt under the Groom and Rundle governments. Over the next four years the Government will be spending more than \$300 million of interest payments.

Going back to that table where the Government picks its best stat, it talks about net cash flows from operating activities. What the Government did not want to talk about is the borrowing cost, which is just three lines above that total. The borrowing costs this year alone - \$44 million; next year, \$79 million; the year after that, \$105 million; the year after that, \$114 million. You see those interest rates increasing every year. Why is that? Because the Government, by continually borrowing, in effect is paying interest on interest, and that does not end well. That \$300 million could employ 3000 teachers to get our schools back up to the national standard. It could be 3000 nurses to help fix our broken health system. Instead, it will be going on interest payments. Over the coming years it will be paying interest on interest, which is a recipe for budget disaster.

By the end of this decade, Tasmania's debt will be larger than the entire state budget. The report from Treasury and the Fiscal Sustainability Report warns that by 2035 interest payments will make up 10 per cent of the budget. If you have a look at their assumptions they make some pretty generous assumptions on where interest rates would be. They are saying interest rates will only go up to 3.5 per cent by 2035. If those interest rates in the next 15 years are higher than 3.5 per cent - which is not out of the realms of possibility - then those interest payments will make up an even greater proportion of the budget. Ten per cent of the budget is getting back to the dark days of Liberal governments in the 1990s.

There is a serious structural problem in the Budget. Treasury has sounded a warning with its recent Fiscal Sustainability Report. Instead of outlining how he plans to fix it, the Premier, Mr Gutwein, is trying to hide the debt with a 'pull the doona over the head' strategy of being in constant denial. We hear that time and time again. They are picking the best statistic, talking about how the budget is going to be back in the black when they are borrowing at a rate of \$2 million a day. They will not admit it and they will not address it.

As Labor leader Rebecca White eloquently outlined in her Budget reply earlier today, Liberal economic management is not working for the Tasmanian people and it is certainly not working for future generations who will be left to pay off this record debt. We are not saying that debt is always bad for governments, that governments should not borrow money. Debt can be used to fund productive infrastructure that will grow our economy. That is good. Debt can be used to fund investments that will save us money in the long term. That is good but, in fact, we will have very little to show for all this debt. It makes it harder for Tasmanians to accept and that is bad - bad for Tasmania and bad for the economy.

We have virtually nothing to show for this continued deficit spending. It has not just been this year. It has been years and it has been happening before COVID-19. We have record hospital waiting lists, which are up 45 per cent since the Liberals took office. There is a human cost to that. There are people waiting in pain for operations they need. Economic costs. As we heard last week, Tasmania's excessive wait times for elective surgery are costing the economy \$120 million a year, so it is a false economy. Not only are these people waiting longer in pain for a necessary operation, it has an economic cost as well, which is \$120 million a year.

We have record waiting lists to see a specialist, which is up nearly 120 per cent - more than doubled, since the Liberals came in. There are now more than 66 000 Tasmanians waiting for surgery or to see a specialist for issues ranging from suspected cancer to hip replacements. Imagine the stress of waiting for that appointment to see if you have cancer. Under this Government there are many people waiting for results. We also see record ambulance ramping, and ambulance response times are the slowest in the nation. In the lead-up to the 2014 election, the Liberal Party pledged that by 2025 Tasmania would be the healthiest state in the nation. Well, they are running out of time.

We have just had handed down the worst NAPLAN results ever. We are the worst state in the country. Since NAPLAN began in 2008, Tasmania's performance has gone backwards in 14 of the 20 indicators across grades 3, 5, 7 and 9. We are performing worse than any state and we are falling further behind under the Liberals. In the lead-up to the 2018 election, the Liberal Party pledged that by 2020 Tasmanian students would be at or above the national standard for reading and writing. Instead, we are at the back of the class. What do we get from the Liberals? We get short-term solutions designed to see us through the election campaign, which is a strategy they have used time and again in the election cycle. One year of pork, three years of pain. On almost any measure, Tasmania's economy underperforms every other state: we have the lowest gross state product per capita; we have the lowest productivity; the lowest workforce participation rate; and the highest proportion of people receiving income support payments, under this Government. That is where we are at.

A record housing wait list. The Budget has confirmed the Government will not deliver on their infrastructure projects they promised. Only a few months ago, 2000 new homes were promised and only 640 funded over the next four years. A cruel deception with more than 4200 families stuck on the waiting list for public housing.

This Budget is built on very rosy assumptions. There are no excuses any more. This is a budget of a house of cards and it is the Liberals' eighth budget so they should know better. The major risks in this Budget is that more than 40 per cent of the state's Government revenue comes from GST payments from the federal government. The Budget Estimates of GST are subject to many uncertainties, including the impact of COVID-19.

The GST calculations used in the Budget have not included adjustments that may arise from the result of the extended lockdowns of New South Wales and Victoria. The impact of new GST distribution model, which will cost Tasmania approximately \$83 million a year, will be felt from 2027-28 but before we get to that, we have seen the ongoing pandemic and the following is a direct quote from the Government's own Budget Papers:

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and associated responses from the Australian and Tasmanian governments create greater uncertainty than usual in the case in relation to the fiscal and economic information presented in the 2021-22 Budget Papers.

When it talks about GST, there remains a high degree of uncertainty in relation to the impact of the recent COVID-19 outbreaks in other Australian jurisdictions on GST receipts. That is because the government and this Budget are relying on the GST revenue forecast from the Australian Government forecast for the GST pool, which were published in May in the federal government's budget before any of these recent lockdowns.

Half the nation's population is in lockdown now, in New South Wales and Victoria. That will have an unknown impact on the GST pool. Furthermore, because of relativities, the extra spending on health in New South Wales and Victoria could potentially reduce the relativity and as such, reduce the GST for other states including Tasmania. The Budget Papers say:

In the medium term, there continues to be ongoing uncertainty related to Tasmania's relativity, which is calculated annually by the Commonwealth Grants Commission and is currently at historically high levels.

If there is any knock-back in GST, what happens? The debt is going to be higher and the servicing costs are going to be higher. There are also other risks to state taxation and government business spending and also funding requirements beyond the forward estimates. In this Budget we see essential services that are not funded in the third and fourth years. That makes the Government's net operating so-called surplus look much better because they are not accounting for all of the spending that they have to make. There are budget items with dots listed after them.

Other risks are general agency cost pressures and health expenditure. The delivery of services in the Tasmanian community continues to present a significant budget challenge. The Budget Papers say:

The Australian Government's funding contribution to health services is funded under the National Health Reform Agreement; however, the growth in Australian funding to the states and territories is capped at 6.5 per cent per year. There remains an underlying risk in the Budget and the forward estimates that additional state funding providing to meet the demand for health services in Tasmania may grow at a faster rate than growth in the Australian Government's capped funding contributions.

That is another risk. We get into this one year of pork, three years of pain strategy, especially on health funding. We see that health funding actually declines next year. We are getting into this budget cycle of elective surgery blitzes, of budget sugar hits followed by a reduction in the following years and not keeping up with inflation in the health sector. One year of pork, three years of pain, it gets them through the election; then they wear it and people wear it and the waiting list extends.

There are challenges that the Government are failing to address. They are letting down our regions and leaving people behind. The phrase 'cost of living' was not mentioned in the Premier's speech. Now, we have seen that wages have been increasing by an average of just 2.3 per cent a year under this Government. Under the Labor government they increased at an average of 3.5 per cent a year. The low wages growth has occurred under the Liberals and it means today, each and every worker is about \$3000 a year worse off.

I would like to quickly turn my mind to my other portfolios, especially in resources. I will talk about mining first. The latest ABS Mineral Exploration data came out only yesterday. What it clearly showed was that exploration expenditure in the past two years has fallen by two-thirds compared to the two years before the Liberals came into office in 2014. In 2012-2013 spending was much higher for exploration than now under the Liberals. This is important because in mining, exploration locks in investment and it extends the life of mines. If people are not spending the money on exploration, that will have an impact down the track. It will

have an impact in mines being able to keep ore in front of them but also it means with less exploration there is less chance that a new operation will start.

These figures also show exploration expenditure fell by a full 30 per cent over the last quarter. When you compare Tasmania's figures to the other states', the corresponding national figures are for a 5 per cent increase and a 4 per cent increase. What are we? We are 30 per cent down. We are going in the opposite direction. This is not surprising, given that Guy Barnett has been independently proven to have the worst results of any mining minister in Tasmania's history when you look at the -

Ms Archer - Prove it.

Dr BROAD - Prove it? From the Fraser Institute. The Fraser Institute does a survey every year. The Fraser Institute surveys Tasmanian mining companies every year. The result that we got, when we are compared to other jurisdictions in the world, has Tasmania at our worst level ever for investability in Tasmania. That is fact. Under you, you have had the worst -

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Dr BROAD - Read it for yourself. *The Annual Survey of Mining Companies, 2020.*

Ms Archer - You said Guy Barnett.

Dr BROAD - Yes, Guy Barnett. He is in charge of mining, isn't he? Minister Barnett -

Ms Archer - Single handedly?

Dr BROAD - Yes, single handedly stuffed this up. Well, maybe not, because there has been a revolving door of mining ministers. I think we are up to our fifth or sixth mining minister since you guys came into government. What have we got here? We are sixty-third out of 77 jurisdictions. That is your record. Some of the countries that we are behind are Namibia, Zambia and Mozambique. This is the record under this Government. It is there for all to see. There has been a massive collapse in mining exploration. You can be in denial all you like but this survey of mining companies is a record of what mining companies think about the way that your Government is operating in Tasmania. That is what this says. It is no wonder.

We heard only last week that this Government is not willing to stand up and help fight Bob Brown's effective veto on mining exploration. They will not defend their own state approvals. This sort of thing is having an impact because the survey of mining companies tell us that your investability in Tasmania has plummeted under your watch, under this Government. It is a disgrace.

The other side of the portfolio is forestry. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the Government will be unable to fulfil its wood supply agreements. We have the Government running around trying to think how they can square the circle; how they can manage to deliver on the contracts they promised before coming into government. They cannot. What we know is that the Government has extended the country sawmillers just for a couple of years to tide

them over. What is going to happen in two years' time? Are they going to cut off all the country sawmillers?

Now they have gone very quiet. They are embarrassed about this one. What is Sustainable Timber Tasmania going to do? There is not enough timber. Are they going to renege on the contracts that were signed in good faith? What does the future hold if the Liberals keep going the way they are? The Liberals need to understand that slogans and politics and grandstanding are not the same as economic leadership.

Mr Barnett has a single strategy when it comes to mining and forestry. He ignores everything that is going wrong. He ignores that there has been a collapse in mining exploration, he ignores a survey of mining companies that tells him that Tasmania is not a place to invest. It is 63rd out of 77 jurisdictions surveyed around the world. That is the worst result Tasmania has ever had. Ignore that. Do not stand up for your state exploration approvals. Let Bob Brown hold that threat.

The forest industry will struggle to get enough timber. What will it do? Plantations are not the solution. They are expensive and there is less recovery. The minister does not address this. All he does is play the same silly political stunt over and over.

They are ready to lay down anti-protester legislation again as if that is going to fix everything. It will not. It has been thrown out by the High Court before. It will give Bob Brown a slush fund that he will take all the way to the High Court. The industry has seen through this. They are asking you to work with them on a solution. We have proposed a solution based on exclusion zones and aggravated trespass.

The minister will claim that the legislation is the same as the mainland. It is not. The mainland has exclusion zones and aggravated trespass. They are banning every protest on every footpath and every road in the state. It goes too far and they know it. Last time they rushed it through this place then they sat on it for a year, then they brought it forward a couple of days before the election. It was blatant politics. The minister has to do better. He has to stand up for the forestry and mining industries and not play silly stunts.

[3.12 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Minister for State Development, Construction and Housing) - Mr Speaker, I can only exceed that effort from the shadow treasurer. That was a very poor performance.

We are surging ahead with our plan to secure Tasmania's future. I congratulate the Premier and Treasurer for bringing down his eighth Budget. It is an incredible amount of work, and I support him in that. I have seen the way in which he and the Department of Treasury and Finance toil together with the committee that is responsible for developing the Budget. I have seen the agencies and the way in which they engage and put forward proposals. I am aware of the energy and the effort, in particular, that the Treasurer puts into these important documents. They are fundamental for not only paying for the services and the infrastructure program but they also lay out the economic plan. Who could doubt that the economic plan this Government has brought forward is working for Tasmanians.

The 2021-22 Budget strengthens our successful infrastructure spending to support Tasmania's recovery from the pandemic and delivers the opportunities and services our

growing state needs. We are building on the strong foundations that we have worked hard to deliver over the past seven years in office and we are delivering on the commitments that we made at the recent election. It is a job-building budget and it is expected to support about 28 000 jobs at a time when our economy is booming. Our unemployment rate is 4.5 per cent. That fluctuates up and down, but to see two consecutive months at 4.5 per cent sends a strong sign of confidence, the equal lowest in the country and lower than the national average.

As I said this morning, 263 000 Tasmanians are in work, the highest in the state's history. We are literally building Tasmania. The Budget supports an ambitious \$5.7 billion infrastructure program to support jobs and to build safer and more connected communities. Following on from last year's record infrastructure program, this year's Budget and forward Estimates will include \$3.8 billion in investments by the general Government sector, with a further \$784 million in support investment from other Government businesses and entities.

We are fast-tracking our investment of \$385 million for the largest port development in Tasmania's history with \$240 million provided to redevelop the port of Devonport and \$145 million to upgrade the port of Burnie. It is part of our plan. I am not sure if it was mentioned by the member who has left the Chamber, the shadow treasurer. If he did, it was very fleeting. This is a game-changer for port infrastructure and for commerce across Bass Strait, principally in Devonport and Burnie.

We are supporting Hydro Tasmania through investing \$700 million into the redevelopment of the Tarraleah Power Station. I do not want this to be a point-by-point rebuttal of the terrible arguments that were incoherently made by the shadow treasurer but I want to deviate briefly to point out that in the Budget Papers the infrastructure program is extensive, across agencies and across activities of business. The Government, and I quote from page 36 of Budget Paper No. 1:

Chart 3.3 shows that, over the 2021-22 Budget and forward Estimates, investment in General Government non-financial assets continues to materially exceed the value of depreciation. In 2021-22 investment in non-financial assets will exceed depreciation by 93 per cent. Table 3.2 summarises 2021-22 Budget and Forward Estimates for Depreciation and Purchase of non-financial assets.

When foolhardy comments are made by the member who has left the Chamber and by the current Leader of the Opposition that we have nothing to show for all this infrastructure spending, the Budget Papers make those out as the liars that they are. We are building infrastructure that has been generationally overdue in many cases, for example, the new K Block tower at the Royal Hobart Hospital; for example, the expanded children's ward at the LGH; like the expansion and safety treatments on the Midland Highway. You cannot argue with the facts and the record.

Depreciation of an existing asset has to be documented, is documented, and the measure of what you have to show for it would be demonstrated, for example, in data reflected in Table 3.3. When you look at the historic chart, there is only one point since 2006-07 when the data series commences where investment in infrastructure was lower than annual depreciation. That is in the Labor-Greens government years.

We are building assets that are needed for this and for coming generations. All we ever see is pathetic point scoring from the Opposition who whinge about infrastructure investment, complain about it, effectively arguing with the civil contractors and Masters Builders and other peak bodies about the fact that the pipeline is meeting capacity of the industry.

They are also arguing against the Government when it comes to key infrastructure projects, like the extra lane on the Southern Outlet, like the Hobart Airport interchange, like the Bridgewater bridge, which Labor Party identities are trying to have a bit of fun with when they should have built that bridge. They never got around to it because they took the money John Howard provided and spent it on other things - ironically to move rail across the river.

Labor moved the rail across the river and now asks why rail is not part of the business plan. You would have to ask David O'Byrne about that if you can get around to talking to him.

I come back to our roads and bridges program. Labor has nothing to offer. At one point they invested less in infrastructure than the cost of maintaining the old infrastructure.

Mr Ellis - It is a disgrace.

Mr FERGUSON - It is a disgrace, Mr Ellis. Our \$2 billion investment over four years in roads and bridges underpins our commitment to support the state's recovery from the pandemic as we grow jobs in the economy. There are a host of landmark projects right across the state in every region. The investment is stimulating the economy by supporting jobs in the booming construction and professional services sectors and provides incredible confidence to businesses to employ, train and grow.

There is more than \$371 million in the current financial year alone for roads and bridges. Some brief highlights:

The Greater Hobart Traffic Solution, including the Derwent River ferry service; bus priority measures; active transport facilities; works on the Tasman Bridge; and works to ease congestion between Hobart and Kingborough.

Funding to continue the Midland Highway Action Plan, which has been expanded, by the way, thanks to the federal government.

Funding for the Bridgewater Bridge, one of the largest infrastructure projects in Tasmanian history. The Bridgewater Bridge tenders are now in and being assessed by my department. Fantastic progress. It would be good if we had some more support from those who should have built it 20 years ago.

There is also funding for the Launceston and Tamar Valley Traffic Vision.

There is funding for the South-East Traffic Solution, delivering a four-lane Tasman Highway all the way from Hobart to Sorell.

There is funding for infrastructure stimulus at East Derwent Highway; Railton Main Rd; electronic school zone signs; the Tasman Highway; Apsley River Bridge; and heavy vehicle rest areas which the transport industry have worked with us to develop. There is funding for road upgrades throughout the north west coast and west coast regions.

These are major investments. They are part of our plan to make our roads and bridges safer and more efficient and productive for our business community and for motorists and pedestrians.

As well, briefly, infrastructure expenditure is lifting across government, including more than \$500 million in hospitals and health, more than \$400 million in human services and housing, and \$336 million in schools, education and skills.

I mentioned briefly stage 2 of the Royal Hobart Hospital redevelopment. - fantastic - together with the mental health precinct at my local hospital, the LGH.

On top of all of this, nearly \$40 million will be invested in major school redevelopments. One close to my heart, a school I taught at, Exeter High School, well due for its upgrade; together with Cambridge; as well as another school close to my heart, Montello Primary School, where my nanna is a life member of the association. I used to help her in my school holidays to clean the windows and floors of that school, together with my grandfather. It is great to see that proud school on Bird St getting its upgrade; and Lauderdale Primary School.

The Tasmanian Liberal Government is transforming our economy through a range of initiatives to develop and build the state.

The Budget delivers a significant \$64 million uplift for the Macquarie Point Development Corporation to bring even more of this waterfront development to life much earlier than originally planned, supporting jobs and stimulating the economy. We will get the next development stage to market sooner and provide the foundation for well over half a billion dollars of investment to take place.

The Budget also provides \$42 million of investment to revitalise the Hobart Showground and construct 450 homes, creating a vibrant, connected community. We are working closely in partnership with the Society.

As well, it is important that we take action to meet increased demand for housing as a result of economic growth, more jobs and, of course, what follows jobs is a growing population, something our state has managed to elude for generations but it is happening now. That is why the Government's innovative Ancillary Dwellings Grants Program, also known as the granny flat initiative, is very important. Grants of \$10 000 are being made available to the first 250 eligible applicants that submit a complete application.

The Tamar River Estuary and its tributaries, the North and South Esks, are the life blood of the Tamar Valley. The Government has committed \$4 million to fund the site-specific dredging program to be established. We are also committing up to \$1 million per year, over the next four years, to support the establishment and ongoing operations of the preferred governance model, on which we are currently consulting with the local community.

To support the Government's ambitious infrastructure program, \$9 million has been allocated to develop the High Vis Army so that industry can grow its workforce by 25 per cent. There has been a bit of commentary around this, and while Labor continued to criticise, I note that they have no alternative.

We have been very blunt. The reason we ratcheted up our investment availability for infrastructure in last November's budget was so that we would have certainty in the infrastructure pipeline. Deliberate and specifically clear. The Premier made it clear last year that he wanted to saturate the industry with work because we did not know what the private sector would be doing. We had advice that there was potential for the private sector retreating. That did not happen and we could not be more pleased that in the last financial year, even though the budget was brought in November, five months after the start of that financial year, we have delivered 245 per cent more in delivery than in Labor and Greens' last year in office. We do not measure ourselves against the failure of the Labor Party but the comparison is extremely useful.

S&P notes that infrastructure is suffering from capacity constraints in delivery. This goes back to the point that, basically, if you want a job in Tasmania, you have got one, with an unemployment rate of 4.5 per cent. We want to grow that industry more so we can continue to build on our successes in that sector.

What about the voice of industry? Industry has backed this Budget. It has hailed our Government for meeting our commitments and providing the stimulus to build our way out of COVID-19. Very flattering remarks about the Government, and in particular, the Premier.

Master Builders Tasmania says:

Construction has led the recovery thus far and will continue to be our economic accelerator and a jobs generator. The Budget supports developments in the community sector, civil infrastructure and a record pipeline of new housing construction.

Civil Contractors Federation says:

This Budget delivers a clear infrastructure plan that will help support hundreds of jobs in the sector.

The CCF praised the Government for delivering on its commitments to fix skills gaps and addressing the boom/bust cycles of the past.

We are grateful for the praise and I can speak about it because we are working so closely with those sectors right now, closer than any government has ever worked with those peak bodies, noting that after the election we signed our Memorandum of Understanding with them. This has already committed us and activated closer cooperation between the Government and those organisations.

I acknowledge that our strong economy and growing population has put pressure on land values. We understand the pressures of Tasmanians buying or building a home. We are taking action to reduce land tax and help Tasmanians into the housing market.

The Government committed at the election to maintaining a competitive tax environment, ensuring state taxes are efficient, fair, simple, stable and sustainable. That is why the Budget delivers, as per our plan, increasing the bottom thresholds for land tax from \$24 999 to \$49 999 and the top threshold from \$350 000 to \$400 000.

Tasmanians have already started to notice these reductions in their bills. The changes mean an estimated extra 4100 Tasmanians pay no land tax at all and that around 70 000 will receive reduced bills of up to \$613 per year, depending on their circumstances. This represents a reprieve of around \$60 million for property owners over the next four years.

We are also making it easier for Tasmanians building or buying their first home. We are extending the First Home Owner Grant from \$20 000 to \$30 000 until June 2022. That has passed the Parliament already. We have also provided a greater support, through the First Home Owner Grant, making total funding across the Budget and forward Estimates of \$49.8 million.

We have also improved the eligibility threshold for the duty concession we offer for first home buyers, as well as pensioners who are downsizing to a smaller home. We changed that threshold from \$400 000 to \$500 000 in recognition of the increasing value of property in Tasmania. The Budget reflects these reductions in conveyance duties.

The Government understands that now, more than ever, it is important that we continue to take action to meet the increased demand for housing. It is occurring because of our economic strength. It is occurring because of growing employment. It is occurring because of growing population. We are responding.

We are responding by investing in a comprehensive Tasmanian housing strategy. We know that Government does not have all the answers. That is why we will be working with the whole of the community as we strive for our next stage of the strategy and continue to make our own record investments into social and affordable housing. I thank Mrs Petrusma, my colleague in Franklin, and Mr Jaensch, my colleague in Braddon, for their hard work in the last two terms of office of this Government in already achieving some great successes.

We will continue our plan. The plan with action plans 1 and 2, together with the Community Housing Growth Program, are helping about 5000 Tasmanian households out of housing stress or homelessness by the end of June 2023 when those plans are replaced by the next evolution. That includes about 2350 new social housing dwellings. You did not hear that mentioned in the Leader of the Opposition's speech.

What comes next is more homes beyond 2023. The Budget delivers on our commitments at the election, which encompasses \$315 million over a longer time frame. That provides for a further 2000 new social houses to be built until 2027. That strategy is funded with \$2 million to ensure it is a success. It goes towards the development of the first comprehensive and long-term Tasmanian housing strategy. This will consider demand across both public and private sectors and formulate strategies to deliver.

As well as the successful initiatives that are already underway, the new strategy will consider a range of other initiatives. We want to explore extending rental assistance programs, a build-to-rent program, housing options for workers in critical industries and commercial property conversions. We will search for further ways to encourage the great Australian family dream of home ownership. We look forward to working with Tasmanians as we deliver that.

Our Community Housing Growth Program is the next step in growing social housing and the role of community housing providers in Tasmania. It will build on and improve the Better Housing Futures program and will transfer a further 2000 properties for management to

registered community housing providers. This includes a growth strategy with the release of about \$100 million in capital grants to construct social housing that will contribute to Tasmania's social and economic recovery.

I am pleased that our social housing and homelessness initiatives have received support from Shelter Tasmania. CEO, Pattie Chugg, said:

We particularly welcome the \$2.1 million ongoing funding for the housing assistance and support initiative and the \$15.3 million for innovative new youth housing and homelessness initiatives is vital to meet the needs of young people.

No previous Tasmanian government has provided this level of economic strength together with population growth. Nor has any previous government responded with such strong measures to deal with the increasing pressure on housing, which I acknowledge is real. We are responding. We understand that stable and safe housing is critical for Tasmanians. That is why we are building and constructing an increasing supply at record levels.

We have already completed the \$45 million modernisation of the Metro bus fleet and improved bus networks right across the state in each region. These have resulted in faster, more direct and more frequent services. These initiatives will be further enhanced by planned bus priority lanes and the Derwent River ferry service now in operation. We are looking to the future with the Budget allocating significant funds in equity investment for Metro Tasmania to trial an electric bus in the south, with further funding to be provided to support a hydrogen bus trial in the north of the state, once hydrogen supply is available.

We are also progressing delivery of a modern common ticketing solution in accord with our election commitments. There is provision of \$25.9 million in additional funding to Metro. This is not just for Metro. This is for all public transport bus providers and will provide commuters with a seamless journey and ensure a fully integrated intelligent transport solution for users and providers of public transport in Tasmania. The modern common ticketing solution will apply to general access public transport operators, including ferry services. This will provide a range of benefits, including fare payment by credit card, phone or wearables. It will make it easy to transfer between services and operators and it will facilitate innovative and tailored fares and incentivise travel.

This was the best public transport policy that any party took to the election. It was recognised as such by the Rail, Tram and Bus Union which said that it wished the Labor Party had adopted our policy. That policy was released in the middle of the campaign and there was more than enough time for Labor to match it. They did not get around to it. I guess they were too busy arguing.

Science and technology is one of my portfolio loves. Time will not permit me to go into too much detail. Across our agencies the Budget invests \$145 million into digital infrastructure and service delivery. This includes funding for the best science and technical policy that any party took to the last election, our \$8.5 million package of initiatives. These are highly targeted to boost Tasmania's digital economy and to improve digital literacy. We have increased Tasmania's digital inclusion index by 8 per cent since we have been in office but there is more to do. We want to make it easier to connect Tasmanians to government services that they need

and that they expect. It has been embraced by the peak body, TasICT, which has praised the Government for funding a raft of ICT projects.

We are investing \$4.3 million to begin development of a new one-stop Service Tasmania digital service platform. When it is built the platform will offer access to Government services anywhere, anytime via any device with a single login. It will make it easier and faster for Tasmanians to engage with government services.

I am proud, as Minister for Science and Technology, to back businesses and to listen to them. Our entrepreneurs and start-ups have been fantastic to work with so that we do not just recover from the pandemic but take the next step in developing their exciting products, new services and take these to market right around the world.

I will conclude with a critique of where Labor got to and their Budget reply. While I have been a member of this House -

Ms O'Connor - There is not much to say, Mr Ferguson.

Mr FERGUSON - Ms O'Connor, you do not always get it right but you did just now. What can I say. I have been a member of this House since March 2010. It is hands down the most pointless and uninspiring Budget reply I have heard from any Opposition Leader and I have heard a few.

Bomber Beazley was famously known as the guy that everybody liked but you could never see him as Prime Minister. His budget replies were fantastic compared to what we heard today. There were no numbers, no initiative, zero passion, no interest from any of the members of her team who waited until she sat down to say 'hear, hear'. The team was not there and there is no leadership. Worse still, Ms White has deliberately mislead the House on a number of points, which suggests she did not read the Budget papers. It strongly suggests that the Budget speech that she falsely claimed did not mention certain words, she did not even read or check what she was told to say today. This has become Ms White's habit and it will not go unchallenged.

Our Budget has been identified as widely endorsed by the Tasmanian community. Nobody would be suggesting it is perfect, but getting the balance right has been a hallmark of our Premier and Treasurer. Difficult decisions have had to be made along the way, notably getting the Budget under control. Just as well we did before the pandemic hit because that was the balance sheet, that was the buffer that helped our state have such a strong ability to keep our people safe while also cocooning our businesses.

The former shadow treasurer, when we were taking supply and stimulus bills through this House, on behalf of the Labor Party, said, 'You have our total support for this and if you need to spend more money, you'll have our support for that too.'. That evaporated last week. Labor has nothing to offer. To try to run an argument around debt and deficit in those circumstances where we have had a phenomenal reduction in forecast net debt by nearly \$1 billion should be reason enough for Dr Broad to send the Treasurer a bunch of flowers and a box of chocolates. That is a stunning improvement in the net debt forecast.

Yet, this from the people who only months ago promised to spend \$3.5 million - \$2 billion more than the Liberals - where does that \$2 billion go when you promised to spend

it? In circumstances of this Budget, you just add the \$2 billion to net debt. That is the grand hypocrisy of on the one hand Ms White calling for more spending here, more spending there, and Dr Broad decrying net debt figures.

I want to set the record straight. Not like the lost puppy of Dr Broad, I also attended the Budget briefings on Friday. I do not believe that Dr Broad has fairly or correctly represented the Premier's comments -

Dr Broad - He didn't say you were back in the black, is that what you are saying?

Mr FERGUSON - Hello, I think that is the sound of some guilt. I am very clear on this. The Premier made it very clear that there is a pathway to surplus and it is really weak and dishonest for the Labor Party to conduct themselves in the way that they have.

Do not take it from me. Take it from S & P Global who, on Friday, stated:

Debt will rise as Tasmania's double A-plus ratings stable funds more health services and infrastructure investment. However, the state's debt will remain low compared with its similarly rated years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend the Budget. I commend the Premier and all my ministerial and backbench colleagues for their great support of our state and a Budget which delivers and secures Tasmania's future.

[3.42 p.m.]

Ms DOW (Braddon - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Deputy Speaker, the Budget before the House today is a commitment made by the government of the day to the Tasmanian people; a commitment outlining how they will responsibly manage the finances of the state, provide better infrastructure services, a government workforce to provide services for all Tasmanians, no matter where they live, deliver their myriad election promises, and address the significant challenges Tasmanians face each and every day.

I recently heard it defined as the need for a budget to be much more than a one-way transfer between government and community, and that sums it up very well.

A visionary Budget has the potential to transform lives and, to me, this is most important, as does visionary policy and structural reform to address the inequalities experienced by many across our communities. With this approach comes economic restructure, social progress, possibilities and an opportunity for change for the better. This is where I believe this Government is falling short. Whilst the uncertainty and threat of COVID-19, and in particular the Delta strain, is always looming, we have, thanks to our outstanding Public Health officials and the hard work and dedication of Tasmanians across our state, kept COVID-free. We only have to look at the current experience of our fellow-Australians, namely those in New South Wales and Victoria, where the pandemic is having such a devastating impact, to recognise just how lucky we are. I want to put on the record my thoughts and best wishes to our fellow Australians at this incredibly difficult time.

Whilst we might not be in a lockdown here in Tasmania, for our hospitality and tourism businesses, taxi drivers, coach companies, musicians and other tourism-related industries such as travel agents, they find themselves in a lock-in which is one and the same as a lockdown. It

has the same flow-on effects to their businesses. This is now over a much more sustained period of time with no light at the end of the tunnel and the Government's small business grants program simply does not go far enough. There is a need also to support workers across our state who are working currently employed in our tourism and hospitality industry.

Businesses are telling us that they are more concerned this time about the ongoing viability of their businesses and their employees than they were during our period of lockdown in this state in our COVID-19 outbreaks. Labor has called on the Liberal Government to stand up to Canberra and demand they help implement the Tasmanian version of JobSaver to keep Tasmanians in work. It is good to hear that the Acting Premier finally penned a letter to the Prime Minister last night. It would be great if he could table that letter so we can understand what was in it. A JobSaver program is required as tourism and like businesses and workers deal with increasingly difficult trading conditions. While border closures have kept COVID-19 out of Tasmania, it has created extremely difficult conditions for many businesses and workers, putting both businesses and local jobs at risk.

Our greatest concern is for workers who are losing hours and are likely to leave the industry entirely because of the lack of support from government while borders are closed. This will leave businesses struggling to ramp up once again when borders re-open. The JobSaver payment introduced in New South Wales is a model that would support Tasmanian businesses and workers. There is flexibility in this payment which is very important. The budget includes, I note, a \$300 million COVID-19 provision, some of which could be deployed to support these businesses and workers to make it through the next few months right now. For some reason, and I am not sure why, there is some resistance on this Government's behalf to do that.

More must be done to support these businesses and workers in our tourism and hospitality industry. We call on the Government to stand up to the government and get Tasmanian workers and businesses the support they need right now in what is a very difficult time.

Despite not having had an outbreak in Tasmania for a long time now, we have missed the opportunity to reset and think differently about the way that we do things across Tasmania. I note the comments across the Chamber and I acknowledge that there was an announcement made by the Acting Premier today but there is still a deficiency in the current level of support that is being provided across the state to businesses and workers -

Ms Archer - How do you know that? For goodness' sake. We have just changed it.

Ms DOW - It has been reported to us. I thought you would know that. You have got your ear to the ground.

Despite not having had an outbreak in Tasmania for a long time now, we have missed the opportunity to reset and think differently about the way that we do things across Tasmania. I repeated that line because it is important. The work of PESRAC did not really create a reset post-COVID where the Government undertook to act and think differently about things in Tasmania and the way that we do things.

Tasmanians are more than an economy; we are people. We deserve to benefit from and participate in our economy, and have an economy that works for us. Sadly, under this Government far too many Tasmanians are currently being left behind. This Government has

no vision for Tasmania and, despite seven years of rhetoric around sound financial management and claims of record funding being allocated across the Budget to areas of need such as health, social and affordable housing and education, Tasmanians appear to have benefited very little from this.

There appears to be very little to show for the spiralling debt Tasmanians are now having to shoulder the burden of and, as we have said in this place before, this Government has squandered the golden year in Tasmania and are now spending outside their means. Our needs as a state continue to grow many of our economic and social rankings across the states; when it comes to education and health we continue to fall.

The way this Government is attempting to address this is not working at all. You only have to look at last week's NAPLAN results to see they are the worst in the country. Our young Tasmanians deserve better and what has this Government been doing for the last seven years.

To many, a budget is a series of numbers, complicated terms and words which very few Tasmanians would be familiar with or interested in. What matters to Tasmanians though is what a budget means for them. I believe Tasmanians will be concerned about the financial position we find ourselves in right now. They understand you cannot put things on the never-never forever. They know what it means to be in the red and in debt. There are a number of reasons why this Government went to an early election and our state's financial position is one of them. What else is the Government hiding from Tasmanians?

When this Government came to office, it had \$200 million in the bank. Now, it is set to plunge us deep into debt of \$3.5 billion by 2025. This Government is taking us back to the dark old days of the mid-1990s and debt. It was Tasmanians who bore the weight of this debt. Let us be clear here: this debt is not all attributed to COVID-19 or record investment in health, as the Government claims, but there was \$1.5 billion of debt on the books before COVID-19. By the end of this decade, Tasmania's debt will be larger than the entire state budget.

I want to state that Labor is not opposed to debt if it underpins transformational change, reform, or facilitates investment in intergenerational infrastructure. Sadly, this has not been the practice of this Government. This Government has form in this place, stating the positive things said about the feedback it has received about its Budget and what key stakeholders or industries have said publicly in the media about the Budget and their thoughts on the Budget. I will use this opportunity to provide some reflection on some of the commentary around the Budget that has not been noted by the Government.

The Advocate on 26 August 2021, said:

Debt, deficits, jobs feature in Tasmania's state budget 2021-22.

Many have talked about what John Lawrence has said about the recent State Budget but I will put it on the record as well. This comes from an article in the *Mercury* titled 'Budget Figures Fudging Battle':

An economist has accused the Government of fudging the numbers in the State Budget to hide the true extent of its ballooning debt.

John Lawrence's harsh remarks come in response to Peter Gutwein's claims that Tasmania was on track for a surplus despite taking on millions of dollars in extra debt.

'The budget is now on track to surplus and will be back in the black over the forward Estimates period, returning to a cash operating surplus of \$368.8 million next year, returning to a modest operating surplus of \$39.4 million in 2022-23-24,' Mr Gutwein said.

However, Mr Lawrence said this was a dishonest characterisation of the economic reality, since it focused only on the net operating surplus while ignoring other measures of debt.

Mr Lawrence said a more objective approach which factored in net cash flows, painted a more grim picture of the Government's bottom line. 'I have never seen such a deceitful speech in all my life', Mr Lawrence said. 'He seriously wants everyone to believe we are going to be in surplus in the next few years'.

If you look at net operating balance, it is completely different figures to the operating surplus in a cash flow statement. In one sentence he has compared apples and oranges.

The ABC also critiqued the winners and losers of this year's state Budget. I will make note of a couple of those as they are key areas of interest to my shadow portfolios. The first in that was around health, in which they said that health was neutral, neither a winner nor a loser. I note in their commentary they said, 'There is no money for an increase in health wages, despite it being touted as a key issue when it comes to staff retention. While there is a lot of money thrown at health, it is unlikely to be enough to deal with an elective surgery waiting list that has grown past 11 000, and category 1 patients who are listed as urgent and should be treated within 30 days, currently have an average overdue wait time of 106 days'.

When it comes to housing, they thought housing was a loser. I tend to agree: 'Despite the money set aside for social and affordable housing, the public housing wait list is predicted to grow past 5000. At the end of this financial year, it was at 4144 with 816 applicants housed. The target for this financial year is to house 1000 applicants and the Government is aiming to reduce the average wait time from 68 weeks to 41.5 weeks'. We will see how they go.

Public transport is the last one I will note, having previously held the shadow portfolio: 'Investment on public transport focused on the state's existing mode of buses. There is no mention of the much called for light-rail, and ferry travel remains a trial'. They are important points.

It is clear this Government is not a government that spends within its means. It is minding the shop and not making any real difference to the lives of Tasmanians. The Government is tired and has run out of ideas. There are a number of risks which have the potential to impact on our budget position. My colleague, Dr Shane Broad, noted a number of these. I will note a couple of the risks outlined in Budget Paper No. 1, the first being around the impact of the pandemic, goods and services tax revenue is a serious risk to the state, as is health expenditure.

I noted with interest the commentary around uncertainty in funding, around significant energy projects in the state and the notes made there around that risk.

As part of the health expenditure outlined, it says quite clearly:

The Australian Government's funding contribution to Health Services is funded over National Health Reform Agreement. However growth in Australian Government funding to the states and territories is capped at 6.5 per cent per year. There remains an underlying risk to the Budget and forward Estimates that additional state funding provided to meet the demand for health services in Tasmania may grow at a faster rate than growth in the Australian Government's capped funding contribution.

That is a concern. That brings me to my new shadow portfolio position as shadow minister for Health. On the night of the night of the election, Tasmanians heard Premier Peter Gutwein promise to improve the state's woeful health system. Despite having had seven years to address this crisis of their own making, it seems even the Liberals could not ignore Tasmania's growing anger over our ailing health system. The chaos in our public hospitals was almost a daily thing throughout the election campaign with both the Royal Hobart Hospital and the Launceston General Hospital at breaking point. More than 50 000 people are waiting for specialist appointments; necessary surgery waiting lists have blown out to over 11 000 Tasmanians, and bed block in emergency departments is now commonplace right across Tasmania. Tasmania has the worst ambulance response times in the country.

While our health professionals continue to do an amazing job under ever trying circumstances, they are left to bear the brunt of public frustration while dealing with their own physical and mental exhaustion due to long hours and inadequate shift breaks. One of Premier Gutwein's first decisions after his re-election was to appoint a new Health minister, Mr Jeremy Rockliff, but the fact is that without more funding and a real plan to address the health crisis, a new minister makes little difference. The problems have not gone away. They have just been handballed to someone else.

With another COVID-19 outbreak on our doorstep, the Premier needs to take immediate action to bring our health system up to an acceptable standard that can cope with any outbreaks here. The Australian Medical Association has said an outbreak of COVID-19 in Tasmania would have a catastrophic impact on the health system that is already in crisis and there continues to be concern amongst health care professionals reported most days.

Surely it is beyond time that the Government listen to our health professionals, the very people working in the system and navigating its many shortcomings. We saw last year just how quickly the pandemic can take hold with the north-west outbreak and extended lockdown causing pain and hardships throughout the community.

The Liberals can claim all they want that they have plans in place should COVID-19 spread in Tasmania but a system already straining under immense pressure is clearly not going to be able to withstand a major public health emergency. Tasmania's border restrictions can only go so far in keeping us safe. They need to be backed up by an agile health system that will not break under additional pressure.

As Labor's policies recognised at the last state election, health needs to be a Budget priority with a clear need for more doctors, nurses and other allied health professionals right across our state. We also need to go beyond the economics and rethink the way we deliver health services across Tasmania. We need better alternatives to hospital care, more community care and a stronger focus on preventative care to keep people out of hospital in the first place. We need a much more accessible system. The tens of thousands of Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas are crying out for better support and facilities, emergency care, maternity care and most importantly, mental health services.

No one deserves to have their health suffer because of where they live. Tasmania needs a system that gives everyone timely access to effective health services. There can be no more excuses, delays or cuts from this Government. The Tasmanian people expect the Government they elected to look after them. They will be watching closely to see if Premier Peter Gutwein keeps his promise this time and finally delivers a health system that takes care of all Tasmanians.

I am very pleased to be taking on the shadow portfolio of health, mental health and wellbeing. I acknowledge and thank Sarah Lovell and Dr Bastian Seidel for their previous contributions to this important portfolio. I have big shoes to fill but I can guarantee the House this: I care about the health and wellbeing of our people and its critical role in our state and people's potential. This drives me to make change that Tasmanians would benefit from. To me, health is fundamentally about helping and empowering people and communities. That is why I studied nursing. The health of our population is critical to our economy and our productivity, and the inequity experienced by many when it comes to access to healthcare across our state is a clear structural deficit in our economy.

Educational attainment and health status are intrinsically linked and directly impact on the social determinants of health. I come from a community health background. I have worked in the hospital setting and I believe there is something very powerful in understanding where someone lives, their family dynamic and personal situation and how this impacts on their health status. That is why I am passionate about primary health care and community care and its role in early intervention and keeping people well, out of hospital.

This must be a focus of Government and was a focus of our comprehensive policy at the last election. I will advocate strongly and passionately for this to be a priority of this Government. I want to thank all our hardworking health professionals across our state in their variety of clinical settings. I am looking forward to getting out across the state and meeting with them and understanding the challenges they face. They do an outstanding job, often in the most trying of circumstances. When I think about those working on the wards at the local hospital in our community, doing double shifts with staff shortages, it must be an incredibly difficult workplace to be in. All the while they are being paid less than their mainland counterparts and we wonder why we have difficulty in retaining health professionals across the state. We need to be far more proactive in training health professionals locally and in regional areas.

The Government has set some bold targets in the Budget when it comes to the health of Tasmanian communities. In my humble view, they will be lucky to meet their target of the healthiest population by 2025. This is also true of their recruitment drive and their sustainability of a rural and regional health care workforce. It is critical that they do continue to try to meet these targets.

I am also shocked that the Government would only now be looking at a safe staffing model for Tasmanian district hospitals as part of this Budget handed down last week. Housing and the shortage of rental and high prices of properties is a significant barrier to attracting and retaining our health workforce. This is also difficult in places like the west coast where housing stock is poor and the local council is wanting to work closely with the Government - I know this because I have discussed this with them - to address this and address the economic impact of this on the local community. I strongly encourage the Government to work cooperatively with them.

Health and health care professionals are incredibly important to regional economies and regional communities. I know from personal experience that health offers a very rewarding career and that there are many opportunities in the care economy right across Tasmania. We should be seizing those opportunities and looking to where we can create employment opportunities, particularly across regional Tasmania in the care economy. In doing that we provide local employment opportunities for local people and we provide localised place space services to people also.

I have met so many people through my office who are suffering while they are waiting for elective surgery. They are not sure why we call it elective surgery because most of it is absolutely necessary and shouldn't be defined as elective. Elective surgery waitlists are up 45 per cent since the Liberals took office and, for Tasmanians waiting to see a specialist, the time has doubled more than 120 per cent; 66 per cent of Tasmanians are waiting to see a specialist for a procedure.

There is the silent epidemic of mental health and wellbeing across our communities. This impacts Tasmania's families and, in particular, Tasmania's young people. I know that through recent media reports and conversations that I have had with people in our local community that this is pretty prevalent across north-west Tasmania where I live.

I know there has been commitment made by the Government in the Circular Head community to fund support services and the commitment to implement recommendations from the CAM review. I also note that the mental health precinct which is to be developed at the North-West Regional Hospital will not be completed until 2025-26. What happens between then and now? The Mental Health Hospital in the Home program will not start in the north west until the year 2023-24 so what happens between now and then? There is a need for a dedicated youth mental health facility in the north west. What happens to those families? What support services are currently being provided by this Government?

I am going to make it a personal responsibility to advocate strongly and hold this Government to account very strongly for the provision of mental services across regional communities. It is paramount. There are families who are suffering, there are communities that are suffering. We need to do more to support people and provide more timely access to mental health services and targeted around early intervention rather than crisis intervention.

The other area of significant concern to me is around oral health and the dental waiting list across the state. I know through my work in local government, the old stories of children and the schools not understanding why children were not coming to school. It turns out that their mum or dad were really embarrassed about their teeth and did not want to take their children to school. Things like that happen, which could be prevented if good oral health were

provided to communities. You can see the flow-on effects of that and the impact that has on families, education attainment and socialisation of people as well. It is really important and oral health can lead to other systemic health issues if it is not attended to and that also can be very serious.

We see people with really severe hernia repairs, hip replacements, knee replacements, aneurism repairs, neuro-surgery assessments, orthotics and podiatry, physiotherapy - the list goes on. There are so many people waiting across Tasmania to access services. Why are we not employing the permanent staff required to make our health service sustainable?

For far too long we have had an over-reliance of locums in this state. It is blowing out our health budget and patient outcomes are worsening under this model. We even saw the closing of the Mersey Community Hospital accident and emergency last year outside business hours due to a lack of staff. That is simply not good enough. It is poor planning on this Government's behalf.

The Budget contains pages upon pages of promises and infrastructure items, many that I note are under significant delay. We have the Royal Hobart Hospital with a \$700 million investment in a new hospital. We now find that just 44 beds have been opened in that space when it has the potential for 250. Why is that? We know the Launceston General Hospital accident and emergency department is heavily compromised. We hear about it all the time. Yet all it has at the moment is a glossy master plan for stage 2 of the hospital.

There are commitments made at the North West Regional Hospital and the Mersey Community Hospital many which are outstanding from the 2018 election. We are seeing that there are delays to mental health beds in the south in the Budget as well. Why is this? There is such a demand in the community. Why are these important projects being delayed?

As a former councillor, I am pleased to be the shadow minister for local government. This Government has no vision for local government in this state. They have attempted reform in the past and failed. Now, without courage or conviction, they have a PESRAC recommendation related to local government reform that they expect a parliamentary committee to work together on and accept without question. We will not be committing to this. There is money in the Budget for this process and it would be incredibly disingenuous of this Government if they had a model in the bottom drawer somewhere in the local government minister's office already developed outside any parliamentary working group.

Labor will only support voluntary amalgamations and believes in the future of local government across Tasmania and its role in providing important services to local communities. We will work cooperatively with local government, the unions and our local communities when it comes to the future of local government across Tasmania. We acknowledge the importance of the employment opportunities local government provides, particularly across the regions and the important role local government plays in regional economies.

This brings me to planning, which is much more than a planning scheme. This Government does not seem to get this. I note the additional funding in the Budget for the out-of-date regional land use strategies. This work is long overdue and we have been calling for it for a long time. It has now got to a point where the lack of work being done by this Government on strategic planning is holding back economic growth and housing supply across the state. I note that there is no mention in the Budget Papers of the Cradle Coastal Authorities Planning

Officer role which was committed to by the state Government. I look forward to learning more about that during Estimates.

Planning for the future is a fundamental and critical role of government but without effective well considered planning and well-intentioned consultation with communities that they impact, development projects in Tasmania are too often polarising, unnecessarily complex and lead to avoidable community unrest. The Liberal Government talks a lot about unparalleled growth in Tasmania and the housing market and unprecedented traffic on road networks unable to cope with it tells us that Australians from across the country want to call our state home. While talking up future growth this Government has not prepared a vision to cope with it.

I recently attended a town hall meeting in Stanley over the proposed wind farm at the Stanley Peninsula where I was reminded, yet again, of the Liberal Government's abject failure to engage with communities or undertake any form of meaningful strategic planning to grow development across Tasmania. Many of the state's proposed developments are unnecessarily stirring community unrest and have the potential to divide our close-knit communities. You only need to consider the Government's plan to demolish homes, to add a fifth lane to the Hobart Southern Outlet or the plan for an overpass at Leith or the Burnie Court complex or the Westbury Prison debacle in the north.

Each of these proposals has been badly handled. They have been unnecessarily provocative. They have resulted in distress and chaos in communities when there did not need to be any. When they were first in office the Liberals promised to fix planning in Tasmania by delivering a statewide planning scheme that they vowed would be visionary and future focused. Seven years on and the tag line 'statewide planning scheme' is a misnomer.

The Liberal Government has defeated its own state of purpose to deliver a planning system that is fairer, faster, cheaper and simpler. It is anything but that. With a lack of policy input or strategic direction, the planning scheme is anything but; it is more complicated. Communities continue to feel left out of the process and growth is being held back across all regions. It is vital that the extraordinary costs associated with infrastructure in future growth areas are recognised as real big-ticket items in this state. Government services like health, education, transport, water and sewerage, and local government services like open space and waste disposal cannot be left to ad hoc decision-making without serious negative economic impacts.

Not only will this continue to frustrate developers and lead to higher development costs, even more importantly we will remain exactly where we are with a demand for development, particularly housing, that cannot be met. This Government has wasted a huge amount of time and significant resources on a statewide planning scheme when it should have been planning strategically for future land supply, housing growth, health needs, transport needs, schools, workforce demands and infrastructure right across Tasmania.

Until the Government's focus shifts to what really matters, Tasmanians will remain stuck in traffic or desperate to put a roof over their head, and communities, councils and developers will continue to be frustrated.

We are still waiting for the implementation of the recommendations of the recent review of the Tasmanian Planning Commission. A Labor government would have acted on this and

established an agency as a dedicated stand-alone unit with functions including developing and advising on land-use regulations or policies, planning for population growth, housing and transport, mapping housing demand and land supply across the state. It is time the Liberals put politics aside and did the same, because our future development should never be about politics. It should always be about doing the best we can for the state and everyone who calls it home.

You do not end up with appropriate development in the most suitable areas by riding roughshod over local communities and dismissing their concerns. You do it by engaging with and listening to locals when a project is planned for their region or their local community. You do it by working with communities and our world-class industries to formulate a vision for the future and plan strategically for growth, with effective policies to guide new development, and you do this long before a planning or development application process.

Tasmanians do not want a government that denies them the opportunity to be actively involved in planning for the future of their state and shaping their local communities. They want and deserve a government that will work with them to plan for the best future for all of us.

This brings me to my advanced manufacturing and defence shadow portfolio. I thank those local enterprises involved in advanced manufacturing and defence and the good work they are doing. I note the inclusion of the funding -

Time expired.

[4.12 p.m.]

Ms ARCHER (Clark - Attorney-General) - Mr Deputy Speaker, it is a pleasure to say some positive things after that contribution in relation to what our Government is delivering. As a united team, our Government is very proud to be able to provide the input in the Budget that we do by way of delivering for Tasmania with respect to my portfolios and the people of Clark. My portfolios are as Attorney-General, Minister for Justice, Corrections, Workplace Safety and Consumer Affairs and the Arts.

The Budget funds the commitments we made to the Tasmanian people during our successful 2021 election campaign. Most of all, the 2021-22 state Budget delivers on our plan to secure Tasmania's future. It builds on the strong foundations our Government has laid down over the past seven years, geared towards growing our economy, creating jobs, supporting local business and connecting the skills and training Tasmanians need to grasp the opportunities ahead.

This Budget sees us delivering the biggest health spend in Tasmania's history with a record \$10.7 billion being invested into our health system. We are also delivering a record \$8 billion of spend in education, skills and training, and an ambitious \$5.7 billion for infrastructure programs to support jobs and build better, safer and more connected communities. This Budget is based on listening to what the Tasmanian community wants and providing support where it is needed most.

As a dedicated and proud member for the electorate of Clark since 2010, known as Denison back then, I know that my local area means more than just investing more in major infrastructure. The spend in health, education, vital community facilities is of utmost importance. This year's Budget delivers on those crucial areas. I will end my contribution

pinpointing some highlights in relation to specific matters for my electorate which are quite significant.

Within my portfolio areas, I have a strong focus today in my Budget reply speech. As Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, I am pleased to acknowledge that our Government is committed to delivering a safe and secure Tasmania by providing an efficient and effective criminal and civil justice system for all Tasmanians. That is why we are investing more than \$35 million over the next four years into the state's justice system, as outlined in the Budget.

This funding will provide for the progression of dedicated measures such as building on our extensive reform agenda, which has been very extensive and continues to be so. We are appointing an additional judge and more magistrates, modernising our court buildings and providing further support for our legal assistance sector, to name a few.

This Budget also enables us to build on the actions we are taking to addressing delays to finalising proceedings in the criminal court system - that is where the backlog is, not the civil system - particularly due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was a period of closure in our court system. This includes funding to support an additional magistrate to hear and finalise more cases to significantly address existing demand pressures and reduce the criminal court backlog. This will be the second additional magistrate since 2019, following the appointment of Magistrate Jackie Hartnett in June 2020. This will bring the total number of permanent magistrates to 17. I am proud of that figure.

We have shown that the additional spend we have put into Justice, since I have been Minister for Justice, we have not seen before in the Justice and the Corrections budget.

The new magistrate will be based in Hobart, where the majority of the caseload is located, but they will also be required to travel statewide, ensuring that the caseload across Tasmania is managed effectively and efficiently, which is a matter for the Chief Magistrate. These appointments are made in close consultation.

As part of this new commitment, we are also investing in administrative support measures and court security, specifically in relation to administration. Members have heard me refer to the \$24.5 million existing investment for the development of a new Astria digital solution as part of our broader Justice Connect project which will bring Tasmania's justice system into the twenty-first century -

Ms O'Connor - What about conversion therapy, if you are going to bring the justice system into the twenty-first century?

Ms ARCHER - Referring to our administrative measures, Ms O'Connor, and in relation to that interjection, we have not received the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute report. We look forward to receiving that and responding in due course.

Additionally, we are investing \$2.6 million over the next two years to extend the appointment of our three acting judges. This follows from our investment of \$1.1 million per year announced in 2019-20 towards the appointment of the seventh Supreme Court judge. I look forward to announcing the new judge in the near future. This will be the first time since 1995, 21 years ago, that the Supreme Court has had seven permanent judges. The Chief Justice

is looking forward to an additional judge to join his list of puisne judges. More judges and more magistrates will mean faster justice for Tasmanians and reducing court backlogs.

We are also providing our courts with the resources they need by investing in the modernisation of our court buildings. The administrative site is important for its security inside. There is infrastructure by way of new court buildings as well. I am proud to lead our commitment to building a brand-new fit-for-purpose court complex at Burnie. The additional \$25 million announced in this Budget for the redevelopment of this facility provides an important boost to the construction industry and an exciting investment of funds into this court complex. In addition to the Government's commitment to retaining the Magistrates courthouse in Devonport, the presence of these facilities will improve access to justice to Tasmanians on the northwest coast.

We are continuing to invest in alternative dispute resolution and the reform of our tribunals with the operations of the new Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (TasCAT) due to formally commence on 1 November. This is an exciting and much-needed development for our civil and administrative justice system. Having all of this under the one roof will deliver more efficiencies. With the third tranche we will be looking to bring other things under the umbrella of TasCAT.

This investment is further complemented by our substantial commitment to the legal assistance sector in the 2021-22 Budget. Reflecting our recent election commitment, we are also including an additional \$2.2 million per annum to allow the legal assistance sector to provide more free or low-cost legal services to Tasmanians who need it. This substantial increase in funding builds on the support provided to the sector under the National Legal Assistance Partnership by the federal government. I look forward to providing figures to each provider in the very near future.

I want to mention our response earlier today. Although it is not within this Budget, it demonstrates the agility of our Government to respond to emergency situations, in particular, the \$50 000 we will provide through my portfolio to the Tasmanian Refugee Legal Service to respond to the international crisis in Afghanistan, our Afghani and Hazara community here and the concerns for their family and friends in Kabul. It will also help the efforts to get Australians and those who have assisted the allies out of that country. The Acting Premier has worked hard in his portfolio to respond to this by providing assistance money to the Migrant Resource Centre and MCOT.

We continue to fund the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions with an additional \$1.8 million in 2021-22, equating to \$6.4 million over the next four years to ensure that our hard-working prosecutors are well-resourced. When we provide more funding to the legal assistance sector it is important that we continue to increase funding to the DPP as well. That additional funding is most welcome.

The Budget allows us to continue to build on our extensive reform agenda to ensure that Tasmania has the strongest possible justice system in place, with accessible laws and better safeguards. It is in stark contrast to Labor which has failed to demonstrate to the Tasmanian people yet again that it is capable of delivering an alternative budget. It is disappointing. We do not get an opportunity to see what they would spend on justice, or what they would spend on the corrections. There is a lot of criticism but we do not see an alternative budget.

In the state election we did not see any commitment to funding one additional correctional officer. Even so, in the absence of an alternative budget -

Mr Winter - It is called scrutiny.

Ms ARCHER - Mr Winter can interject all he likes but he needs to understand the failures of the team that he has joined to provide an alternative budget. Providing a speech with no figures and nothing to back up what they are criticising shows that they have forgotten about my portfolio area of justice and my other portfolios. It is very disappointing.

Turning to my Corrections portfolio, I am pleased to highlight that the Budget provides for our Government to continue an increased focus on rehabilitation within the state's correction system. As part of this Budget and pursuant to our commitments made in the state election earlier this year, we have strengthened our focus on rehabilitation, investing almost \$2.5 million towards new rehabilitation programs and staff within our prison system over a three-year period.

Through our work to reduce reoffending and increase rehabilitation opportunities in Tasmania, we are establishing new partnerships with organisations so that we can provide increased therapeutic support and other programs. We know that access to programs, education and employment for inmates is critical to achieving these outcomes which is why, as a priority, we are helping to address the underlying reasons why people reoffend and maximise the chances of successful reintegration back into the community.

The additional \$2.5 million investment in this year's Budget includes \$780 000 over three years to partner with the Australian Red Cross to deliver its community-based health first aid program. I note the media release issued by Red Cross welcoming this funding and the opportunity to run this program. There is \$610 000 over three years to partner with Connect 42 to deliver the Just Time prison parenting program, \$100 000 over three years with Dress for Success Hobart to expand the Welcome Backpack initiative and \$500 000 per annum for two years to fund five new therapeutic staff to work within the prison with a focus on delivering rehabilitation programs and drug and alcohol interventions. We have recently been recruiting for those five new therapeutic staff who will be able to commence soon.

The state has a strong opportunity to achieve better outcomes for individuals and reduce the rate of reoffending in order to achieve beneficial outcomes for the whole community. Ensuring that we are providing effective rehabilitation within our prisons is critically important and this significant investment demonstrates that we are serious about ensuring rehabilitation as a core focus in the corrections space.

I am proud to be leading this investment. I am looking forward to seeing the outcomes of our targeted focus in this area. We are always looking for new and increased opportunities in the rehabilitation space. That is why it was a great opportunity yesterday to announce the partnership with Kickstart Arts and Community Corrections which is outside of the prison system. Community Corrections is not as high a profile but they do incredible work. I thank them as well as our hardworking TPS staff because they do fantastic work with those people on community-based orders which have been ordered by the court.

We are also addressing the increased demand pressures on the Tasmania Prison Service in this Budget. That is why, as part of the Budget, we are providing \$4 million per year over

the next four years to further alleviate the existing demand pressures in the system. This booster funding will allow for the effective operation of our prison service and will support the major recruitment campaign that is currently underway to bolster the number of correctional officers within the Tasmanian Prison Service's ranks. This new campaign will add to the more than 215 extra correctional officers we have recruited since 2016, including 79 in 2020.

We will continue to provide the additional resources to support staff at our prison facilities to do this difficult but rewarding job. We remain committed to addressing the challenges within the service.

I will also thank the two unions involved in our regular meetings. I thank them for meeting with me in late July. The unions have been meeting with my department, with the TPS and with management. I would like to thank management for their contribution to those regular meetings to ensure that we are addressing all of the current demands in the Tasmania Prison Service. They are contributing to our ideas for rehabilitation, and they are contributing to our ideas for recruitment.

I also want to say something about working with the unions and the Police Association of Tasmania in relation to getting police out of the courts in Burnie. It has been more difficult than in Launceston because in Launceston we have a prison facility in the reception prison. We do not have that in Burnie, so importantly, in this Budget, we have provided a significant additional funding of \$13 million over four years to free up more frontline police in our community so that more police are on the beat keeping Tasmanians safe.

As I have already outlined, as part of our first 100-day plan we have already recruited the three new court operations officers who have commenced work and will assume responsibility for managing the public in the foyer and gallery areas at the Supreme Court in Burnie. Retired police officers are also being engaged to provide in dock security and assist Tasmania Police with escorts of people in custody.

While there will need to be some transitional arrangements to ensure a safe and orderly transfer of responsibilities, once the new model is fully operational the requirement for Tasmania Police to attend the court will be limited to emergency responses, as is standard procedure in other courts across the state. Throughout this process the Department of Justice has engaged with staff, unions and other stakeholders to ensure they are kept informed and provided with an opportunity to raise issues and I thank them again for being involved in that process.

I now turn to my Arts portfolio. Often, I leave this to the end and I do not want it to be cut short this time. We have a very strong focus on reviving our cultural and creative industries and providing the sustained support that we have to date to this incredibly diverse and vital sector which enriches the lives of all Tasmanians, supports thousands of jobs across the state and adds millions to our economy.

During COVID-19 it has been a rough period for our arts industry but they have also been critical during COVID-19 with providing the online digital content, which I know has lifted the spirits of many, many people, particularly those in Tasmania. As both the Minister for the Arts and an avid personal supporter of the Tasmanian arts community, I am particularly committed and focused on generating further job opportunities within the creative sector and building momentum in our creative economy for the benefit of all Tasmanians. That is why

we have committed over \$12 million in support to the sector during what has been a very challenging 18 months for artists and arts organisations. We have worked hard to deliver a suite of support, stimulus and recovery initiatives to get our industry back on its feet.

It is always difficult when you provide support packages to ensure that everybody is able to apply and gain some success and we have done the very best that we can since we announced our first stimulus package in March 2020. It was nation leading. We were first off the blocks and certainly on a per capita basis we have, I believe, provided the strongest stimulus throughout the last 18 months. We have continued to deliver significant support to the sector ever since March 2020 with a range of new and ongoing support stimulus and recovery initiatives, as I said. We recognise how important it is to continue to build confidence and momentum within the industry.

That is exactly what we are doing in this Budget by injecting an additional total commitment of \$5 million for arts funding over the forward Estimates. A key component of this funding includes an additional \$1.2 million per year to support Tasmanian arts organisations, reflecting a 50 per cent increase in annual funding available to support our vibrant artists to engage and inspire audiences and to deliver certainty and confidence for our cultural and creative industries. I do not think people realise how significant that is. When our Government took over, there was significant cuts to arts and there was never an increase, as far as I am aware, to arts organisation funding. This Budget also includes a specific allocation of \$200 000 to support Tasmanian freelance artists through the Creative Support Small Grants program, which will help our freelance artists to get back to work in the gig economy.

We know that small local events in local communities mean just as much to Tasmanians as the larger scale productions and that supporting our local communities is an incredibly valuable part of being Tasmanian, which is why this program is so important and opportune for the sector. This Budget's funding allocations are in addition to the \$4.5 million in stimulus support announced in March 2020 where we provided a further \$500 000 for arts organisations. So, again, significant injection for arts organisations as well as \$1 million to support the reactivation of our live performance sector and \$3 million for Screen Tasmania screen innovation fund. That fund was an initiative of our Government, I am proud to say. It was an election commitment of mine as Minister for the Arts at the previous state election.

This further \$3 million to that fund will continue to showcase Tasmania as a destination for film and production in our burgeoning screen industry. This builds on our \$2 million share-the-risk Live Performance Support Program as well as building on a \$4 million allocation in last year's state budget which enabled the establishment of new programs and initiatives to support organisations, performers and artists to recover, form partnerships and produce new work.

In the past the arts were flushed by former governments but our Government has prioritised the sector as can be seen by our continued targeted investment. This Budget delivers on our commitment to provide sustainable support to the cultural and creative sectors so that it continues to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, securing the industry's future.

Finally, I acknowledge some of the important and ongoing initiatives being undertaken within my Workplace, Safety and Consumer Affairs portfolio that will continue to be funded in the 2021-22 Budget. It is a renaming of my portfolio that I had. It was renamed and badged as Building and Construction but it is important to note that I have maintained the responsibility

for WorkSafe Tasmania and that involves workplace safety, workers compensation and industrial matters, also Consumer Affairs and Consumer, Building and Occupational Services (CBOS). There has been no change there, other than a description change that reflects those two areas.

As minister for this important portfolio I am committed to ensuring that Tasmanian workplaces are the safest in the country. In July, our Government established a dedicated COVID-19 response unit within Worksafe Tasmania to assist Tasmanian businesses with COVID-19 conditions. This sits outside of the work that WorkSafe Tasmania was doing throughout COVID-19 and I thank them for their dedication and service. The enormity of the work that they have done is incredible. We have funded a specific unit that sits within WorkSafe Tasmania so that they can continue to concentrate on their work during COVID-19 as well as their regular work that they do in relation to workplace safety.

This dedicated unit comprises six inspectors spread across the three regions of Tasmania and is helping to ensure that the health and safety of Tasmanian workers in the community is protected throughout COVID-19. WorkSafe Tasmania inspectors are on a frontline educating business to ensure that workplaces are actively applying COVID-19 controls.

I thank the Tasmanian community for their extraordinary efforts in implementing COVID-19 controls and the restrictions that we have had to apply on occasions and working cooperatively with WorkSafe Tasmania inspectors. I have, as minister, some incredible feedback about our inspectors. I want to highlight and thank them for their work in taking that educative approach rather than a punitive approach. It has served our state incredibly well and Tasmanians have responded.

The establishment of this unit, as I have said, follows our Government's additional funding for the recruitment of six new inspectors earlier in the year which has enhanced WorkSafe Tasmania's capacity to play its important role in the COVID-19 response as well as continue with its broader compliance program to ensure the safety of Tasmanian workers in all industries.

We have also taken strong and decisive actions to protect Tasmanian residential property owners and tenants throughout the pandemic. I have spoken on numerous occasions in relation to Tasmania being the first government in Australia to legislate protections for residential property owners and tenants through our COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions Act) 2020. We have had our rent relief fund and our landlord support fund throughout COVID-19. Collectively they have accessed over \$4.356 million of assistance through both support funds.

I have three minutes left to dedicate to a few more matters. I want to mention the support that we have received for this Budget. I know that the Acting Premier has referred to some of this this morning. There has been a lot of support for the additional funding in Justice and I thank Legal Aid director, Vincenzo Caltabiano, who has supported the Budget measures and stated: 'This is wonderful news and we thank Attorney-General Elise Archer for her support of this important issue and area of the law.' That was in relation to the additional funding they received. They continue to work in the space of family violence and the work they do is incredible, as are all of our legal assistance sector.

I will touch on delivering for Clark and, in doing so, I welcome our new Liberal member for Clark, Ms Ogilvie, who is right behind me. I welcome her to the team. She is enjoying her time being with our Government and I am looking forward to continuing to work with her in delivering for Clark.

There are a lot of initiatives in this Budget for our electorate of Clark, in the northern suburbs, the Greater Hobart area. There are many commitments in there and we do that because, as I go out throughout my electorate, there are many needs within our community and our sporting associations. I have had my ear to the ground since 2010, and when I was on the Hobart City Council from 2007 as well. If you are out there in the community doing the work of a local member, you know the needs and wants of the community. We get criticised from the other side for spending in our electorates but it is a little bit of jealousy but we do this because we know there is need.

To mention a few, I have had a long association with the Glenorchy District Football Club. There is \$145 000 for the upgrade of their interchange facilities at the KGV Oval. Glenorchy Cricket Club will benefit as well with respect to that. There is \$100 000 for upgrades to the Claremont Junior Football Club rooms; \$350 000 for new lighting at Claremont Oval for the Claremont Junior Football Club and St Anne's Cricket Club; \$71 900 to upgrade facilities at Claremont Golf Club; \$212 000 for the conversion of the Glenorchy-Rodman Bowls and Community Club bowling green. That is to name only a few in the northern suburbs.

Time expired.

[4.42 p.m.]

Mr WINTER (Franklin) - Mr Deputy Speaker, this is a great opportunity to comment on Tasmania's Budget, the economy and the statement of priorities, and where we are fiscally, according to Treasury's numbers, which we know are beyond reproach.

As a former Treasury cadet, I appreciate the work that goes into this document. It is a process that takes not just Treasury, in fact, but agencies right across the Tasmanian government and a long process that a lot of work goes into. It is important that the document is of high quality and the numbers within it are of high quality and beyond reproach.

As the Leader of the Opposition said today, the last 18 months have been a potent reminder of why many of us feel so lucky to call Tasmania home. She talked about Tasmania's distance and island status over our history often being seen as an inhibitor to growth, as a challenge, as a problem and not necessarily as being an opportunity.

Almost more than anything, COVID-19 has told us that it is also an opportunity: it is an opportunity for Tasmania to showcase the fact that we are relatively safe. Of course, we are not immune to the impact of COVID-19. We are aware that there is always a risk. Comparatively though with the rest of the country and the rest of the world, we have been in a much better position than even what we are seeing in New Zealand, which had been on a similar path as us of not having the same challenges that other areas in the world have had. We are watching them go through some issues there as well. So, as opposed to it being a threat and a challenge that we are an island and that we have the distance, and the impacts that it has on things like exports and imports, the ability to do business with other states and the rest of the world, perhaps this is an opportunity for Tasmania to take an opportunity. It will be interesting to see how this plays out.

It is fair to say that 12 months ago none of us really knew where we would be. Certainly 18 months ago, I remember, as mayor at the time, looking at our budget and thinking 'What on earth are we going to do?'. It did feel like things were falling apart. We know that things have gone relatively better, and that is demonstrated in the numbers in the Budget. It is true to say that the debt position is not as bad as thought. We know the economy across Australia has fared much better than was expected, which is a good thing but that does not take away from the budget challenges we have.

I reflected on - we always reflect on what our role here is - what is the role of an Opposition? It is to hold the Government to account and so, when we receive a budget, the most important document that the Government will table, we need to scrutinise it very closely. That is what we will do.

The Budget that was handed down, in a historical context, sets about the worst fiscal conditions we have seen in the last 25 years in terms of the projections for net debt, in terms of the net operating deficit. For example, the 2020-21 net operating deficit was \$411 million, which is a record; it is the highest that has ever been. The 2021-22 estimate or budgeted number - \$690 million - will break the record that we have only just broken. The year before that, in 2019-20, the operating deficit was \$338 million, which was also a record deficit for Tasmania. What happens when you run large deficits consecutively? You build up debt. The issues with running debt in the short term - and this is outlined in Treasury's very good Fiscal Sustainability Report - they are not great in the short term, they are not even great in the medium term; they are in the long term.

The fiscal economic statement that Treasury brought out only a couple of months ago outlines the projections for debt and for deficit over the coming years, over the long term. They raised serious concerns about the requirements for corrective action to be taken. It talks about the size of the corrective action required to maintain fiscal sustainability increases over the projection period. It shows the projection results. It projects out the net operating balance. It does not show an improvement, as the Budget shows: it shows a continuing trend downwards.

That is what we have seen over the last three years. We have seen operating deficits continue to grow from record to record last financial year and then a new record projected or budgeted to be for this coming year. The operating deficits have been the number that the Treasurer has held out for over a long period of time. Previously Labor has raised concerns about this measurement. It talks about how perhaps the underlying result would be a better measure but the Treasurer has been steadfast that we will use the net operating balance. Unfortunately, those numbers, while they might have worked for him a couple of years ago, no longer do.

The high expenditure projection that Treasury put out in their statement talks about a net operating balance getting worse over time. As Dr Broad continues to say, you cannot hide the debt. No matter how you skin the Budget, the numbers that will continue to get worse over time will be the debt number unless, as Treasury calls for, early intervention occurs.

Scenario 3, the high expenditure scenario modelled by Treasury, will have \$30 billion of debt by 2035. This is obviously an issue. Treasury raised the issue, as they are required to under the act. They said, 'Here's the long-term projection for this Budget and for its sustainability', and they have said there is a problem.

I expected that in this Budget we might see a response to that long-term strategy. If we are going to build \$3.5 billion in debt in this Budget - and that is what is planned - what is the plan to get out of that? This is how debt gets built up when you start running large deficit budgets, which is what is happening. It is \$300 million to service that debt over the four years. It is not insignificant but it is manageable at the moment. The problem is, as things get worse and time goes on, what is going to happen then?

I expected to see in the Budget a response to the current issues that are facing hospitality and tourism businesses across Tasmania. We did not see anything. We have not heard anything today apart from the concession of lowering the \$50 000 turnover to \$25 000, which is welcome. It was a good start but there is still a lot to do for businesses like the ones we have heard about over the past couple of weeks that are represented by people like Michael Bailey or Luke Martin, who yesterday very publicly said, 'We desperately need some help'. The only good thing is that there is \$300 million set aside in the Budget for, we assume, things like this. We are hoping for some kind of action from the Treasurer or Acting Treasurer to fix it.

The next point is risk. Treasury lists a comprehensive set of risks and where they sit within the Budget context. They are significant and they always are. Two most concern me. The first is the GST distribution arrangements which were signed by Mr Gutwein and then premier, Mr Hodgman not that long ago. Treasury raises concerns in the Budget about what the loss of GST revenue could do to the state in the not too distant future. In 2027-28 the current guarantee ends and Treasury is raising concerns that Tasmania's GST revenue will decrease by \$83 million in that year under the guarantee. Western Australia is expected to gain \$5.6 billion, or \$1945 per person, while every other state, including Tasmania, misses out. I cannot figure out why any of the states, apart from Western Australia, signed up for this. Whoever the Treasurer is when delivering the 2028-29 Budget - and it might seem a long way off - he or she is going to have a large issue to deal with at that time because of the deal that we signed up to.

Why would Tasmania sign up to a deal in which we are demonstrably worse off? Saul Eslake said at the time that it was a terrible idea. The Opposition and the Greens were screaming that it was a terrible idea. It was a big feature of that particular Budget period, yet somehow we signed up because we received a relatively short-term guarantee until 2028.

I am concerned about what we are going to do with that. It is very similar to the Mersey deal. I was disappointed that in the Budget the balance of the Mersey fund that, I understand, sits within TasCorp, is not disclosed. I asked Treasury during the briefing so I feel confident in saying it. I assume from the Treasury point of view that is because it sits in the TasCorp balance sheet. The balance of that account has to be falling over time. The last year is \$99 million that we are drawing from the Mersey account to help pay for those important north west hospital services, at the same time as we lose potentially hundreds of millions of dollars in GST receipts because of the deal we signed up to. The Mersey deal was freely signed up to and the GST deal was freely signed up to. Concerns about both were raised at the time, yet we freely signed up to the Australian Government's offer and both were bad deals.

I am concerned about what they do for service delivery, what they do for our fiscal position, and what they do for debt in the long term. It will be difficult for any government at that time to deal with them, unless another deal can be struck. At this stage there is no sign of that.

Tasmania's GBEs over the past seven years, have been a cash cow for the Treasurer. The Hydro dividend is dropping to \$20 million from \$115 million last financial year. Equity is being put into government businesses like Hydro and TasWater of around \$100 million. At Macquarie Point there is \$64.6 million over three years for further remediation. This must be getting towards -

Ms Ogilvie - Nice and clean.

Mr WINTER - Very clean. Almost 10 years ago the initial \$50 million for remediation came from the Australian Government for that project. We have a cul-de-sac now but not a lot of activity. It is starting to look like good money after bad.

Ms Ogilvie - Do you not want to clean it up?.

Mr WINTER - I like things cleaned up but I also like things built and developed. It is hard to defend. If Ms Ogilvie wants to defend Macquarie Point -

Ms Ogilvie - Environmentally sound solution, Mr Winter.

Mr WINTER - Good luck. I want to mention election commitments. The Liberals announce something at one election, go through the term and then announce more stuff and then in the next term they will start delivering the things they did from the term before.

This morning, Mr Ferguson announced that he will start consultation on the fifth lane of the Southern Outlet. That was not an election commitment from the recent election. That is the one announced in 2018, January or February. Today, he triumphantly announced consultation. The timelines on that are not flattering. Over three-and-a-half years they will do some consultation. He tells the member for Clark that it will not be 17 homes destroyed, but he will not say how many. There will be consultation. I wonder how that project is going?

He said in question time last week we should wait to see the Budget. We have had it. There is nothing in the Budget about the fifth lane. I have used the search function on the online version to see if I had missed it, but it is not there. That is concerning. It was originally planned to be a \$35 million project. It was announced during caretaker mode and I assumed there was time for a scrupulous level of testing on how much it would cost but I suspect it is going to be a lot more than \$35 million to deliver a fifth lane. Acquisitions of up to 17 homes - maybe it is not 17 homes - we will find out. The length of time, the significant amount of work that will go into that project I suspect will cost a lot more than \$35 million. If the minister does not know, he will have a fair idea and I look forward to finding that out. That is why Estimates is good because we get to ask questions like that.

In my area, the Premier arrived at 2020-21 election to tell us that the Kingston Health Centre would be expanded. We did not quite find out when. We found out in the Budget that 2027 is the delivery date for that. Again, past the next election. We will have to go through another election in order to get what we asked for at this election. That is very disappointing because we need more health services in the suburbs and towns, not just in Kingston, but across Tasmania. We need to provide more services in those areas. There is need right now but that is not to be delivered until 2027. It is not fully funded in the Budget either because the funding is in years five and six, presumably in someone's spreadsheet somewhere. It is certainly not

showing in the first four years as much money. It is less than \$10 million, off the top of my head. That is disappointing for those people who were told that this would be fixed.

The Algonia Road interchange, again in my area, 2027. This one was fantastic. The Liberals put signs up on the roundabout to tell everyone they would fix the issue that had been there for seven years. Then we find in the Budget that they will not deliver it until 2027.

Mr Jaensch, the minister is here. The Huntingfield development: if the project goes ahead from here the houses will be built before 2027. The issue for local people in that area will be the impact that exists already. School drop off time has finished now, but I know that there are students and parents at Tarraleah and at St Aloysius in that area who sit there for up to half an hour to try to get out after school. It is half an hour they could have with their kids at home doing homework, doing after school activities but they are stuck in traffic and there is no plan to fix it for another six years.

This issue is showing as delayed Budget projects throughout the Budget. It is not just in that area. The northern prison is set for delivery in 2029. The Bridgewater police station upgrade in 2026. We have the Brighton High School in 2025, which I believe has been delayed as well. The Stanley Highway tourism upgrade is not until 2028. The Sideling upgrades, 2029. This is an ongoing issue where you promise the world to people in the short term but you just do not deliver, if at all, but if you do, much, much later.

The Budget is a statement of priorities and it is a statement of our fiscal circumstances as they sit. The circumstances that we are in, in a fiscal sense, are not rosy. They are very different from the way the Treasurer expressed them on Thursday and they are concerning. When you have Treasury raising the concerns that they do about the long-term future of Tasmania's Budget situation, when you have risks like the GST issue, like the Mersey Hospital issues, both of which will have significant impacts on the Tasmanian Budget in the longer term, then we should be holding this Budget to account. We should be scrutinising it and that is what we will continue to do.

I look forward to next week to scrutiny and to scrutinising my portfolio areas and to try to get some of the answers I have not received by reading the Budget.

[5.05 p.m.]

Ms COURTNEY (Bass - Minister for Education) - Mr Deputy Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to reply to the 2021-22 state Budget.

This Budget, as some of my colleagues have pointed out quite rightly, focuses on our plan to secure Tasmania's future. We know that at the moment we are living through a particularly uncertain time; not just the impact on the health system of the COVID-19 pandemic but the broader impacts that this has had on the economy and the community more generally. We are determined to keep Tasmanians safe and we are here to be able to deliver on what we said we would do in May last year when the people of Tasmania endorsed the policies that we are delivering.

They chose to re-elect a government that is continuing to invest in the things that are important to them - our growing economy, creating jobs, supporting businesses and, importantly, investing in those essential services such as health, education and housing. This is what this year's Budget does: \$10.7 billion for health, \$8 billion for education, skills and

training, and \$5.7 billion in infrastructure so that we can build the infrastructure Tasmanians need for the future. This is what the Tasmanian community resoundingly endorsed earlier this year.

I am excited and humbled to have been given the privilege of the Education portfolio. Having been given that after the strong legacy of my predecessor, Jeremy Rockliff, is something I take seriously. A catalyst for me originally becoming an elected member was wanting to ensure that we had a government that was going to deliver on our year 11 and 12 policy. It was something I fundamentally believed in. Also, the challenge that we have had, and had at the time when I made the decision to stand, about young people not being engaged in education.

My predecessor has delivered a range of enormous reforms over his time as minister, which are being embedded and some of them are getting very strong results. I take my responsibility very seriously as minister for the education of our young people across Tasmania to ensure that I am doing everything I can to ensure that those reforms continue to deliver outcomes for those young people because ultimately education is such an important driver of opportunity for them.

In this year's Budget we are committing a record \$8 billion for education, skills and training to ensure that we do have the resources there so that children and young people can grasp those opportunities. It is education that unlocks the potential that we have here and the possibilities for young people.

I thank our teachers, our school leaders, our professional support staff and all those who work in our schools and child and family learning centres. It is your dedication, your professionalism, your expertise and your passion that I see every time I visit a facility that underpins these initiatives and gets great outcomes for young people. I also acknowledge the fact that it has been a very challenging time to deliver what you do day-in and day-out with COVID-19 not only impacting last year but the threat of it always present.

The 2021-22 Tasmanian Budget includes unprecedented investment to bolster our schools and provide more support to students including recruiting 40 additional in-school quality literacy coaches so that we can support our children's learning, employing more psychologists, social workers, speech and language pathologists to make sure that we are embedding the gains that we have made and ensure children and young people are getting the wraparound support that they need so that they can be at school ready to learn.

We are recruiting more school health nurses, expanding the program that the Liberal government reinstated, taking the total number of nurses to 57. Investing additional support for children and students impacted by trauma: this, I know, is an important one. This is how we support children who need our care most and, importantly, it includes a component for supporting our professional staff so that our teachers, teachers' assistants and those in the school community can also be supported to be able to provide appropriate support. This takes our total investment to \$22 million.

We are continuing to recruit additional teachers, building on the teachers that we already had recruited and who are teaching in our schools, and we are making record investments into education infrastructure with new commitments of around \$116 million. This will allow investment at a coeducational high school facility in Hobart, a support school package for the

new north-west support school, upgrades for contemporary classrooms and a renewable energy schools program. In combination with the infrastructure projects that we are already delivering this additional investment takes the total capital investment program for education over four years to \$271.8 million.

We are also investing \$4.7 million over four years to deliver senior secondary assessment and exams using technology and online platforms to start licensing a new secure reliable online assessment platform. We are delivering \$3.8 million to deliver a new support and wellbeing team model for our child and family learning centres, building on the success of what we have seen delivered in our schools. We know that this currently operates in schools and will ensure access for speech pathologists, psychologists, and social workers whom our very youngest need, to ensure that they stay engaged with learning from the very beginning.

The Budget also provides extended funding for the 24 Carrot Garden Program enabling this highly successful program to be expanded, adding an additional three secondary schools in the south and two primary schools in the north-west. We also deliver on our \$56 million proud investment into educational adjustments to support students with disability across our Government and schools. This is a proud and exciting achievement and I acknowledge the work of Christian Desmond in this space.

We know this program has resulted in the recruitment of more than 50 FTE additional support teachers and has expanded support to a further 2000 students. We are committed to reviewing the program after 2022 to ensure it is meeting its intended aims, supported by data and the experience of students and their families. For the communities of Bass, there are important investments in school facilities including \$24 million for the construction of a new primary school in Legana and \$11 million for a major redevelopment of Exeter High School. It was great to see that consultation of the community for that has commenced. I noted in my mailbox yesterday; \$624 000 to complete the \$4.5 million new kindergarten at East Launceston Primary School and \$31 609 to upgrade the Beaconsfield School pool.

There is no greater supporter of students than this Government. We believe that no matter where you are born, no matter what your circumstances, we will ensure that you can have the education and the chances to grasp opportunities and ensure that our growing economy is open for you to benefit from.

With regards to Disability Services, we are committed to ensuring that we help those with disability access the support that they need. This Budget sees us deliver on our election commitments as well as charting a path to improve empowerment and accessibility in our state. The Budget includes \$1.2 million over four years to establish the first ever Tasmanian Disability Services Commissioner, a much-needed position that will provide a new level of oversight for the community. There is strong support for this initiative and even stronger interest in what the model and the remit of what the commissioner will be. Many Tasmanians with disability and their families, supporters and loved ones want to know how it will interact with government and service providers and what complaints it will be able to accept and manage. There are a number of other aspects as well.

This will be a complex set of matters to work through but we are determined to ensure that we actually get this right and it is my commitment there will be meaningful levels of discussion and consultation with key stakeholders. Realising the establishment of this position is one of my top priorities as minister. We have started consultation, with initial feedback

received via my first meeting with the Ministerial Disability Consultative Group in July. I will have more to say on the broader consultation that we will have with the community in the near future but suffice to say that the Government will be working closely with the Ministerial Disability Consultative Group and other key disability stakeholders to seek further feedback and making sure we are meeting the needs of community as best as we are able.

This Budget also includes \$1.4 million over four years to boost the Tasmanian Autism Diagnostic Service which will deliver additional assessors to meet demand and help support more Tasmanians to access necessary services. In line with our election commitment, we will continue our investment of more than \$1 million in annual funding for independent advocacy organisations such as Speak Out Advocacy, Advocacy Tas and the Association for Children with Disability. We know that these organisations provide crucial representation and advocacy services for Tasmanians with disability, their families and carers and we are committed to supporting them to continue their work.

Importantly, in this Budget we have also provided funding certainty for the National Disability Services with more than \$660 000 over the next four years to support their work as a peak body for local disability providers. We are also continuing our strong investment in the NDIS with over \$1 billion committed over the next four years, currently more than 10 900 Tasmanians benefitting from the scheme. Remarkably, this figure includes over 6000 people who are receiving supports for the first time. We are committed to providing high quality inclusive services for Tasmanians and I am looking forward to further work in this portfolio.

With regard to my responsibility of hospitality and events, we know they are critical for the recovery of our economy, particularly in regional areas. All of us would acknowledge that these are industries that have been some of the hardest hit throughout the pandemic. I thank these operators. The tenacity, the innovation, the hard work that they have shown has been extraordinary. I really believe in these industries and in the opportunities that they provide. I am really proud that I continue to be minister for these portfolios. At the most challenging times, it is important that we focus on what we need to do to ensure as we rebuild, that we rebuild in a strong and sustainable way. We know that they are critical to what makes Tasmania special when we talk about the great attributes we have in Tasmania as a place to see, to come, to visit and, indeed, to come and live. We know that so much of that is predicated on our events and our hospitality offerings. They do such an extraordinary job capturing what is unique about Tasmania and that unique Tasmanian story that we have to tell.

We also know that things are challenging and so this is why we have not only provided substantial support over the past 18 months but it is also why we have our \$8 million package to build a brighter future for the hospitality industry. We know it is going to rebound. We know that we have to have those building blocks in place and we know that we have to be looking to next year and the year after so that we can get the fundamentals right for these industries.

To help attract people back to our regions, we have established a regional hospitality revival fund which I launched recently and it provides grants of up to \$1500 to hospitality businesses outside of Hobart and Launceston so that they can undertake activities that will drive visitation. There is a lot of breadth in this offering. The reason and the rationale for that is because an individual operator will know what is best for their business. It is a great opportunity for a business to be able to take on board an initiative that would perhaps be out of reach. We are also extending support to the THA's Great Customer Experience program with

\$2.4 million over three years and the Clubs Tasmania programs with \$1.15 million over the next four years to build industry skills.

We are providing \$6000 for mental health and wellbeing programs for employers and their staff, and \$600 000 to support women in the sector to take on leadership roles. Importantly, we will provide \$2.25 million over three years to work with the THA to develop Hospitality 2030 which will be a shared industry vision and a long-term plan that will help guide how we will build on the strength that we have to grow the visitor economy and create sustainable jobs for Tasmanians.

With regard to the Events sector, we are commencing the \$31 million investment to help industries grow and attract events that will drive economic growth, tourism and create jobs. To secure our iconic events, we are providing \$18 million in this Budget for multi-year funding agreements to secure Dark MOFO, Festivale, Junction Arts Festival, MONA FOMA, the Australian Wooden Boat Festival as well as Targa. These events are critical for driving visitation around the state. They attracted nearly 40 000 visitors to Tasmania in the pre-COVID-19 environment. The return was around \$170 million.

Not only do these events drive great economic outcomes for small businesses, they create a cultural event that Tasmanians love. They are so critical to part of our identity. The suite of offerings that the Events Tasmania portfolio has means there would be very few Tasmanians that do not have the opportunity to benefit from at least one of their events each year.

We have also committed \$8 million to support existing events and attract new ones through the Events Support and Attraction Fund which will help secure existing events and draw tens of thousands more visitors to the state. As well as supporting these iconic and large events, we also know the importance of community events. Through the \$1.5 million Regional Events Recovery Fund, events will be able to apply for up to \$100 000 over three years to undertake activities that contribute to the sustainability of their event.

Many of these community events are run by volunteers who make enormous contributions to ensure they can have sustainable events that support local communities. This support allows them to embed sustainable practices and they can be viable into the future.

I commend the hospitality and event sector. I am in awe of their capacity to be so resilient in a time of such uncertainty and difficulty.

I am the Minister for Skills, Training and Workforce Growth. Looking through the suite of initiatives we are delivering through this Budget, the underlying theme is it is about creating more pathways for Tasmanians into jobs. This is working to remove barriers and remove impediments. It is about providing clear pathways for people to navigate systems. This is about ensuring whether you are young and emerging from school, whether you are an older worker wanting to return, if you are returning from parental leave and wanting to re-engage with the workforce, that we have those pathways available for you to do that.

The economy is growing. Businesses are crying out for workers. We need to create partnerships between industry and Tasmanians to ensure that they can create those pathways and benefit from the opportunities that the growing economy has. We need to deliver a suite of products to be able to deliver this aspiration. The fact that this Budget has \$135 million of new investment into skills and training clearly shows that we are committed to delivering

outcomes. We have \$98.6 million for TasTAFE, \$20.5 million for the Working Tasmania package, \$13.8 million for the Delivering Local Jobs for Local People plan.

The Tasmanian Employer Bonus Fund is one of the fantastic initiatives that this Budget supports, which is aimed fairly and squarely at job seekers who may be facing barriers to securing work and securing a pathway back to employment. There are a number of eligible employee categories, including long-term job seekers, people with a disability, carers and mature-age workers returning to the workforce.

This is about how we provide them with a pathway back into employment. This program features funding of up to \$6500 for each eligible new employee taken on to help meet the costs associated with taking on new staff.

Upfront costs are barriers for people to be able to get a job, whether it is a licence, equipment, the right tools, and making sure that they can be job-ready. This is where the Job Ready Fund is helping job seekers access these essential items.

We are also determined to make it easier to connect businesses with our workers and with Tasmanians seeking work. This is at the core of our \$13.8 million Delivering Local Jobs for Local People plan that will see the creation of a new regional job hub, taking the number to seven, which will service needs all around Tasmania. This is important work that is being guided by the Jobs Tasmania unit, which is in the Department of State Growth.

The Budget provides \$1.5 million for the Jobs Tasmania hub partnership and \$350 000 to deliver targeted support for the Devonport Fit for Work project and the Migrant Resource Centre employment programs.

The Budget also delivers funding for the establishment of the new \$400 000 Workers Connect Portal and there is \$200 000 to roll out a program of regional job shows and events. This provides opportunities for connections between people who want a job and people who have a job to offer. We will expand our successful job matching service through investing another \$2.4 million to help more job seekers in local job vacancies. We will expand our Area Connect Service through an additional \$3.2 million to help get people in regional areas to work, training and education when no easy options exist.

I spoke earlier in my contribution about my passion for young people and making sure that they have pathways and that they are supported in their pathways. The Budget provides \$850 000 for the Youth Navigators program, which is helping year 12 school leavers impacted by COVID-19 to consider further education, training or employment options. This will be complemented by a \$1.3 million Youth Connectors pilot program, which will provide targeted support to young people looking for jobs and training through new dedicated specialists working in jobs hubs in Sorell, Glenorchy, and George Town. Local industry and local workers have been crying out for the sort of support that many of these programs offer. We have been listening and we are delivering.

I mentioned earlier our investment in TasTAFE. I am proud of the work that is underway to evolve TasTAFE to ensure that it can deliver the training our community needs to grow the workforce of the future. It provides training for thousands of Tasmanian learners every year. We want to ensure that we can drive better outcomes that closer align with local industry and ensure that TasTAFE is ready for the future. I flagged earlier this investment which includes

recruitment of 100 extra teachers, \$10 million for the virtual campus increasing access to regional students, \$2 million for Skill Up! which provides free short courses to support job readiness, \$4 million to increase TasTAFE rural and remote access through Libraries Tasmania and \$45 million for TasTAFE facility upgrades. We are investing in TasTAFE infrastructure, people and the way that it delivers training and teaching.

In the north we are delivering a \$10 million expansion of a health hub at Alanvale, including new facilities to deliver alcohol and drugs, youth and mental health training as well as new equipment supporting electro-technology, metal and fabrication. I am proud of the initiative at Alanvale, particularly the new facility for alcohol and drugs, youth and mental health training.

There is a need to make sure we are upskilling and getting more Tasmanians engaged in these important areas. Work we are doing alongside TasTAFE and with other providers to ensure that we have a workforce that is there to support Tasmanians in need is critical. In the south we will build new student accommodation so we can maximise the benefit of our new Centre of Excellence at Clarence.

In line with the implementation plan I released last week, we have been engaging and consulting with staff, industry and stakeholders on our plan. Our plan is not privatisation. TasTAFE will remain not-for-profit, no existing employee will be worse off, and there will be more choice for learners and more contemporary employment arrangements. Throughout this process we will continue to engage with staff, students, unions and industries.

I also have the portfolio of Children and Youth. This is one of the most important portfolios we have within Government. There is nothing more important than the safety and wellbeing of our young people. Since 2014, through my predecessors, Mrs Petrusma and Mr Jaensch, a suite of things have been delivered. I am pleased that this year's Budget has further initiatives to support our children and young people.

Our headline commitment to children and young people is the development of the state's comprehensive, long-term, whole-of-government child and youth wellbeing strategy. The Premier is very proud of this, as am I. It recognises the multi-faceted approach and the fact that we need a Tasmanian community to be able to support children and young people and, importantly, their families and their carers around them.

We will invest \$100 million over the next four years on an action plan to deliver the strategy, which was recently announced by the Premier. Among a range of initiatives, we are investing \$6.5 million over four years for Bringing Baby Home, which supports the intent of our Strong Family, Safe Kids redesign of our child safety system. This program is designed to provide intensive pre- and post-birth support to parents whose babies are at imminent risk of being removed and placed in out-of-home care. It will provide 24/7 residential support that aims to remove the immediate risk for the baby while remaining in the parents' care and building parents' capacity to care safely for their children.

Kids Care Clinic is another important program which will see better outcomes for our most vulnerable children, supported with \$6 million funding for a multi-disciplinary statewide community paediatric service model. These paediatric clinics are specifically designed for vulnerable children and young people, who will be able to access a range of assessments and care in one location by a consistent team of medical professionals.

There is \$875 000 in this Budget for funding for the Commissioner for Children and Young People to provide more opportunities for children and young people to express their views and participate in decisions, and have their voices heard. This is one of the regular topics I have in my discussions with the commissioner, the importance for governments to have that mechanism to listen meaningfully.

The Budget also provides \$5 million over four years to support new permanent, stable family placements for children in out-of-home care. We are extending supports for informal kinship carers with an additional \$225 million. Kinship care plays a crucial role in the lives of Tasmanians who are unable, for one reason or another, to live with their parents.

We are also providing children and young people who are in out-of-home care with priority access to government services, supports and concessions, with investment of \$2 million into the Sure Start initiative.

We want our young people to be safe and to be loved. We want them to thrive and be able to fulfil their full potential. With those portfolio responsibilities, it is something I take very seriously and I will continue to deliver.

In the short time I have remaining, I will reflect on the electorate of Bass. First and foremost, earlier in the year I was re-elected by my community. I am pleased that there are so many aspects of our delivery across government that, in Bass, help Tasmanians. Time will not permit me to detail each of them but I will highlight the important investments, particularly in road infrastructure around the electorate of Bass and the Tamar Valley.

Many people commute regularly into Launceston from the Greater Tamar area. Ensuring that our roads are safe, that people are able to have traffic that flows freely, is critical. I commend my colleague, Mr Ferguson, on the work that has been done. Also in Mr Ferguson's portfolio are the Tamar dredging program and the Tamar Estuary governance program. These are critical to ensure this can be delivered. I believe in the Tamar. All Launcestonians and probably outside Launceston want to see a healthy river and making sure we can have access for users for that river, as well as healthy outcomes for that river. I commend the work that has happened in previous years, particularly in the upper estuary to remove nutrients from the river. While there is still work to do, it is good to see that gains have been made.

We have received funding through this Budget for Playgroup Tasmania for their facility at Invermay. This is a wonderful facility that delivers great community programs and is in an accessible location for people in that local community to be able to work together.

In conclusion, I commend the Treasurer on delivering yet another Budget that delivers to secure Tasmania's future. I am very proud to be part of a government that is doing that and I am wholly committed to continuing to deliver in each of my portfolio areas.

Sitting Times

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House do not stand adjourned at 6 p.m. and that instead the House continue to sit until 7 p.m.

Motion agreed to.

[5.35 p.m.]

Ms O'BYRNE (Bass) - Mr Speaker, before I go to my substantive contribution, I want to touch on one of the comments made by the previous speaker, the minister who spoke on TAFE. The reality is that the sector, TAFE students and the families of those people who are committed and passionate about TAFE - I know that there are people in this House who have been TAFE teachers in the past - have no confidence in those commitments you have just given. It is privatisation by stealth. It will impact on staff. It will impact on students.

What we have is a poorly thought-out announcement by this Government that the Government is now desperately trying to find a policy framework to figure out. That is not the way we should be conducting the future of TAFE. TAFE is too important to Tasmanians, and has been important to Tasmanians for generations. It is the pathway to engaged economic participation and social inclusion for many Tasmanians. There are many of us who are emotionally attached to it as well. My late father was incredibly proud of once training the Apprentice of the Year, who was a TAFE apprentice.

We will be holding the Government to account on changes to TAFE. We will be watching this very carefully. At this stage, I have not seen anything from the Government that makes me feel they have a genuine commitment to the future of TAFE, rather than a policy vacuum that they are desperately trying to fill.

Mr Speaker, this is the sixteenth State Budget I have been at, except that I was not at this one. It is the first one I have missed in those 16 years but I did watch from quarantine. I have a number of things I want to pursue. I will be pursuing a number of other things in the Estimates process.

One of the biggest concerns I have had about Liberal Party budgets in the eight that they have given since I have been here is that significant lack of vision. There is a difference between spending the money you have or, in this case, some money that you do not have, and actually using economic levers that significantly change the structure of our economy, that allow us to be more sustainable and provide a more equitable and fairer society and future for Tasmanians.

The Government says it has had lots of difficulties and it is always very hard to come up with these ideas. But every government before this one has used its term in office to do something that fundamentally changes the structure of our economy. It does something that physically invests in our future, that changes the way our economic participation continues.

I remind members who this took place even during the Global Financial Crisis. Even during those incredibly difficult days, we still, in government, heavily invested in the irrigation rollout. It is that irrigation rollout that has provided some economic gain for this Government but I have not seen them do anything that has fundamentally changed the structure of our economy to allow us to be able to have a stronger, more sustainable society.

They will say, 'Oh, our year 11 and 12 rollouts'. But we have seen some really disturbing outcomes from year 11 and 12 rollouts, some disturbing attendance records for the huge cost that is applied to it. It is about the transition beyond year 11 and 12. If all you have is an

attendance policy that you are not doing particularly well at, what you do not have is something that transitions young people into a future. That is a significant problem.

The Government has talked a lot about how wonderful everybody thought the Budget was so I thought I would provide some other commentary that has been handed around. I quote from an *Examiner* article where Saul Eslake said that the scrutiny of the Budget begins at Budget Estimates:

... economist Saul Eslake said that Tasmania's Budget papers were a long way from 'best in show' compared with five other states who have handed down budgets. 'The conclusion is,' he said, 'that Tasmania could and should do a lot better.'

He said that Tasmania's Budget papers were considerably less informative than those of other states and territories and this year's even more so than in previous years.

Mr Eslake said:

'Tasmanians are in the dark about the economy in 2022-23 and 2023-24. Ordinarily, annual Budget papers set out Treasury forecasts for key economic variables: at a minimum, economic and employment growth, the unemployment rate, inflation and population growth. In this year's Budget papers Treasury said that 'the COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges for economic forecasting and has led to an increase in the level of uncertainty present in the forecast'. Fair enough. No one, least of all anyone with any experience of forecasting, could argue with that but Treasury goes on to say that 'due to this uncertainty, forecasts have only been prepared for 2020-21 and 2021-22. This is, frankly, a copout

I want to talk as well about the contribution from respected economist John Lawrence who accused the Government of fudging the numbers in the state Budget in order to hide the true extent of its own ballooning debt. He said:

I have never seen such a deceitful speech in all my life. He seriously, [the Premier], wants everyone to believe that we are going into surplus in the next few years.

There has not been the kind of overwhelming love and support of this Budget that this Government would have you believe. Certainly, if anyone listened to question time today they would be of the view that this Budget was welcomed with high praise from everyone. But there are significant concerns about this Budget. There are significant concerns about those commitments that do not even appear in this Budget at all. Yet we are expected to believe that they are going to be delivered by some government in the future at a cost that is clearly not identified or understood. The reality is that Treasury would have this information. There is no way Treasury is operating in an environment right now where they do not know what 2022-23 and 2023-24 looks like. They would have that information. If the Government is choosing not to share it in these papers, then you have to wonder exactly what this Treasurer is hiding.

The other issue that I want to talk about is budgets broadly. It goes to an issue that has had some public attention in recent time. The members of the upper House, and I applaud them for this, have talked a lot about gender budgeting. Much of the interest in that came from what

was very evident during and post the initial stage of the pandemic and that was the unequal impact of the pandemic on women and the very clear structural inequities in our economy. Women were the first to lose their jobs. They were hardest hit during the pandemic. There are a host of reasons for that: insecure work, the nature of the industries that women are in, and the fact that many women work more than one job in order to pay the bills. That is why in the lead up to the last election Labor called for a specialist working group to be made up of Treasury, industry, workers representatives, and women to look at the flaws in our economic structure that leave women so heavily exposed, so that when there is an economic downturn it is women who are most impacted.

We did not win, so we are not able to pursue that in Tasmania. However, I am very pleased that the Victorian Government has picked up this issue. They will be investing heavily into work to look at what it is in the economy that is so flawed that it means that women are so heavily impacted whenever there is a downturn. Whether it be continuation of this pandemic, a future pandemic or some other kind of disaster across the world, it is always women who are most heavily impacted.

Gender budgeting is one way to address the inequitable distribution of a state or a nation's wealth, of its capital and in particular its social inclusion and participation. That is why gender budgeting has been part of Labor policy in Tasmania since 2016, when we announced that Labor was committed to proactively gender auditing all our economic announcements in government and ensuring that we have an economy that works for all. We committed that under a Labor government all economic policies would be gender audited.

Members may know that today is Equal Pay Day. Today recognises that it takes women an additional 61 days of work to get the same amount of money that they would have been paid had they been a man. So, 61 days in and we have caught up on last year. We have a way to go before we get onto next year's entitlement. In 2016 it was 65 days to achieve that. Before we get really excited that perhaps women have broken some phenomenal barrier here, recognise that the gender pay gap is 14.2 per cent and that gap has increased by 0.8 per cent in the last six months. Under the current rate of progress we are probably looking at some 25 years before we would close the gap for full-time workers but that is if we were continuing to trend down. One of the significant concerns is that trend up we have just seen in the last six months. There is no one cause of the gap. There are many important factors around discrimination, around undervaluing roles that are predominantly done by women; the predominance of men in the best paid positions and of course the perennial issue of none equal care and responsibility.

The 2012 Workplace Gender Equality Act was legislated to promote and improve gender equality and remuneration in employment within Australian workplaces. The act requires organisations to report annually against a number of gender equity indicators including remuneration and provides each organisation with an individual report that compares their gender equity standing to industry benchmarks.

I note that whilst we are saying that the solution might be to send women into manufacturing roles that the pay gap actually grew in this last 12 months in manufacturing. It was an area where we saw a significant shift upwards; I think it was 4 per cent in terms of an increase in the gender pay gap in that industry. The industries around electricity demand to see a job but it is not a simple solution to say we need to work in male-dominated roles such as manufacturing because clearly, they have some significant concerns within that industry.

According to Workplace Gender Equality Australia, despite major advances for women both educational and workforce participation the gender pay gap remains a permanent fixture of the Australian labour market. What exactly would gender budgeting be and why would we like to have seen this Government start to address it and start to put it in place? Australia was an early leader in gender budgeting and auditing. When I was doing some work with women's organisations and chatting to the United Kingdom government just a couple of years ago they were saying, but of course you have done all this marvellous work in gender budgeting. I had to say that it has fallen by the wayside in recent years.

The Liberals abolished the full gender impact statement in 1996. It has since been replaced with a smaller document that deals with specific women's policy but does not analyse all the gender impacts. Gender budgeting, or gender proofing, refers to the process of proactively integrating gender equality into the mainstream of policies, programs, projects, institutional mechanisms and budgets and addressing gender inequalities through gender specific measures for and with women, men or both.

The standard assumption that is normally made by policy makers and policy-making organisations is that work is somehow gender neutral. Work is there and you turn up for work and you are not going to have a gender impact on that. However, it has been proven that gender differentials are frequently not recognised and that the assumptions made in policy-making include biases in favour of existing unequal relations. Gender proofing is based on a solid analysis of the current situation, with and where possible the use of good statistics and data and that ensures the policies and practice are not based on incorrect assumptions and stereotypes.

Gender proofing policy does not replace specific gender equality policies; it absolutely should not do that. It must act as a complementary strategy that enhances the cumulative effects of both approaches. The aim would be for gender equality to be a significant element in weighing and recommending policy options and ensuring that the recommended option contains no legal, economic, social or cultural constraints to gender equitable participation in the proposed measures, outlining in the recommendation measures to ensure that the policies are implemented in a gender sensitive and equitable manner.

Women are particularly vulnerable and as we have seen recently hit harder by government policy or economic shifts for the following reasons:

- Social security or welfare payments make up a greater share of women's incomes than men, and women earn less in the labour market.
- Women pay less direct tax than men as women earn less in the labour market.
- Women make greater use of public services than men, linked to greater care responsibilities and greater use of care services.
- A higher proportion of women's employment is in the public sector than it is for men.

Gender budgeting exercises now take place in over 40 countries around the world. It was originally inspired by the early experience of countries such as Australia before we walked away and given further momentum by the United Nations' commitment to gender budgeting in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Look at how a couple of countries have approached this. Sweden has gender impact assessment as a relatively common instrument to support gender mainstream implementation. It appears to be very strongly embedded. It is carried out at the initiative at different levels of governance from the local level through to the national level. At the level of government offices, gender impact assessments are most regularly performed when drawing up government bills, terms of reference for inquiries for committees, and other relevant documents. Every level that government makes the decision about that decision you have to look at it through that gender lens. The implementation of gender impact assessment is conducted in the framework of the Swedish government's mainstreaming strategy.

In Spain, gender impact assessments have been required by law in the Basque countries since 2005 in the framework of the Equal Opportunities Between Women and Men Act 2016. Furthermore, and I apologise if my pronunciation is not appropriate, Gipuskoa within the Basque area has also developed its own gender equality act which regulates in detail the GIA process. This was applied for the first time in 2007 by the Basque government when the assessment procedure was established. Since then reports have been issued on more than 500 decrees and laws. Gender impact assessments are now a consolidated practice which is embedded within their regional government.

At the fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the UN member states made commitments to uphold the platform for action and agenda for women's empowerment. The platform for action established gender mainstreaming as the major global strategy for ensuring the incorporation of gender perspectives in all areas of societal development and the promotion of gender equality.

Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, signatory states have an obligation to take appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary and other measures to progressively realise economic rights, to use maximum resources to do so and, according to Elsen, to avoid retrogression. With regard to that, states are required to demonstrate no deliberate retrogression and they must show that they have considered alternatives. So at every stage something might unpick any move that women have made in terms of economic equality, they have to show why that is and what they have done to avoid that.

When we talk about the things we can do to achieve gender economic equality, quite a lot of them do sit within our federal colleagues' remit. They would need to develop those taxation and spending mechanisms in a way that takes on board the likely impact of women's equality, which is why it is so disappointing that we have not had that within this budget. It used to exist but stopped in 1996.

There are other things that we can pursue. We could better safeguard and invest in our social economy or infrastructure. Cuts to the public services and spending, while they may save government money in the short term, end up costing our society much more dearly in the medium to longer term. Women carry the greater burden of that. Taking more action to unleash women's economic potential and support contribution to growth, whether as employees or in the greater economic leadership roles, tackling gender segregation and the undervaluation of women's work.

It is laudable to encourage more women to consider roles in traditionally male-dominated areas, but at the same time we must encourage more men into areas like the caring professions.

Then, perhaps, we may start valuing and paying them at the rate that they deserve. Just moving women into male-dominated roles does not address the inherent inequity in those sectors that have predominantly employed more women. The work has to be two-fold.

Access to affordable and good quality childcare for all families would make a difference. Creating more decent jobs on reduced hours or flexible basis would make a difference. A flexible basis is not women having to work two, three, four or five jobs to make ends meet. That is not a flexible basis; that is desperation.

It should include a requirement for employers to publish information on the earnings distribution of men and women in their workforce and a strategy to end occupational segregation. We need concerted action to help more women find jobs, including through a revised economic policy that includes job creation through investing in social infrastructure rather than what we have, which is a narrow focus on physical infrastructure. This results in jobs that predominantly go to men.

We have to develop a strategy to improve working conditions, training and retention of the social care workforce. That is going to make a fundamental difference because the majority of care workers and receivers are women. We need to address high rates of casualisation. We need to address underemployment and workforce participation which I think in Tasmania is about 61 per cent at the moment.

If people are giving up looking for work, that does give an inflated image of how your employment record looks. If people are working three or more of those jobs in order to make ends meet, then we are not addressing the flaws in our economy. We have to better understand underemployment and we have to better understand the lack of participation in the labour market. I am pleased to hear more voices calling for gender budgeting. It is necessary. It will make a difference.

I am very disappointed that the Government has not pursued it within this budget. I hope that the nature of the debates that go on in the coming months will change that and we could actually see budgets that fundamentally understand the inequitable economic circumstance within which we live. I talked about the impact of budgets on people's lives. I will use a male's experience now because when we have waiting lists blowing out, when we have people waiting to get an appointment to get on a waiting list blowing out, there are tangible, painful outcomes for individuals and their ability to participate in society.

Earlier this year I read out this person's story and I wanted to touch on it again. Justin from Launceston received advice from the then minister for Health's office to see his GP to try to get a second referral to the orthopaedic clinic at the LGH in February 2021 to get a reappraisal of his elective surgery category based on a significant deterioration of his knee. He was placed on the waiting list as category 3 on 26 November 2020. An appointment for 3 March was subsequently granted. He spoke with the orthopaedic surgeon, outlined his clinical history, particularly his 29-year struggle with chronic pain resulting from a previous spinal cord injury, major depressive disorder and PTSD.

He explained that the extreme and intractable pain resulting from the recent advent of osteoarthritis in his knee caused him to become housebound and dependent on a wheelchair, occasionally suicidal and unable to sleep. The latter condition had endured for more than four

months back in February. In combination with other factors it has ruined his quality of life. What I said then, was the response that he got.

The surgeon dismissed any possibility it might be recategorised as level 2 or 1, saying that there are at least 300 other persons in the same situation as him. The surgeon added that the funding cuts by the state government in recent years created waiting times of 500 to 600 days for joint replacements. This does not square with Ms Courtney's written assurance to me that the LGH continues to review its wait-list.

The minister then talked about the additional funding for elective surgery categories over the next eight months. News at the time indicated the wait times in all three categories had blown out significantly beyond what was clinically appropriate and the additional investment falls well short. The Government says again it is going to throw more money at elective surgery and that is somehow going to make everything better. They will struggle to deliver those elective surgeries, they will struggle to get through the waiting list, or the list to get onto the list. The numbers sound big and I am over-quoting the numbers because we need to tell the stories.

Justin is only one person whose pain has made his life unbearable. He is barely able to leave his house. When he does, he is in agony, he has significant mental health issues, yet he will languish on that list, not getting any of the support he needs. There are very real implications.

The Government today talked about how fantastic their future plans would be for housing. It does not deal with the people who are insecure in their housing right now. I have done this job for a while and once when someone came to you with a housing issue you could normally unpick what had gone wrong, normally work out where in the system something had failed. I could always find a place for people to stay. I cannot do that anymore. That breaks my heart. I have never had to watch people walk out of the office and tell them I have nowhere for them to go.

We got a call in the office today - we will be writing to the minister - about a woman with five children who is in emergency housing and is due to be evicted in a few weeks. There is no plan for her. Even if on the last day you find a plan, the stress that her family is going through now not knowing where they are going to be, is having an impact on every interaction they have in life.

Every time we talk about those large numbers, we have to remember they are individuals. That is a significant issue within our family violence space. Women are turned away from shelters every day. Not from permanent accommodation, not from relative's houses, but from the place that is supposed to catch the people who are most desperate. We asked the Government how many people are turned away. The Government says it has no way of calculating that because women will approach a number of shelters. That is not true. When you call a shelter and beg for a space, they ask you a number of questions and it is logged. They know who you are and they know who you are when you go to the next shelter.

It is untrue of this Government to say that it cannot say how many people are turned away because it does not have that data. What is the point of collecting it if you cannot extrapolate it? If there is no point and intention to extrapolate that data, if that is not something you are going to do, then stop making our overworked workers within the sector go through this raft of

information. Stop putting women through all of those questions every time, if you have no intention of taking the data and doing anything meaningful with it. It is hideous.

We will be touching on prevention of family violence quite heavily. We only have half an hour, which is not unusual; but there are still significant concerns with the ability of the sector to be able to respond to the demand and for women to get the supports they need to leave. One of the reasons women do not leave is because they do not have a safe place to go to. If they do leave, and cannot find somewhere safe to go and then go back, they are at greater risk. If the most difficult and dangerous point for women and children is the moment they leave, just imagine how difficult it is to go back.

I outlined a case of a young woman - the minister may remember it. The young woman was living in an almost unaffordable situation at a caravan park. She could not have all her children as she could not afford to take care of them. I said in this House that if you do not find her a house, she will go back. Well, she did go back and she was beaten up. The department then had to find her a house - but they put her through that. It is hideous. I am conscious of my time, so I will move on to some of the other areas.

I am, like most people, very excited about a move to treaty and a move to truth-telling for our Aboriginal community. I have concerns about a number of the funding implications around that and other areas within Aboriginal Affairs. I will read into *Hansard* the concerns that have been raised by Michael Mansell from the Land Council of Tasmania, in an article from the *Mercury*:

Talks of a treaty within Tasmania's Aboriginal community and the state government are in doubt with Thursday's Budget announcement not providing enough funds to make it happen, according to the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania. Chairman, Michael Mansell, said he was sceptical. Both Victoria and the Tasmanian Governments have started a process towards a treaty, Mr Mansell said.

Victoria allocated \$68 million in the process but there is not a dollar in the Tasmanian Budget - which raises doubts about the likelihood of a treaty. The Government should have set aside \$10 million for progress on the process of a treaty. Mr Mansell said outside of the treaty, there wasn't enough funding in the Budget for the Tasmanian aboriginal community. Out of \$7.25 billion only \$270 000 is spent directly on Aboriginal people. Can you describe the Budget as fair or as a white Budget?

The article goes on. There was talk of review to the Aboriginal Heritage Act in the Budget. We have seen that the distribution of the document about that; but Mr Mansell said the funding did not consider the needs of the Aboriginal community. The Government is committed to the review and has allocated resources to it; however, it has all gone to the department. The Aboriginal community has to hold meetings around the state on the sniff of an oily rag, with funding only allocated to the department to talk to who they want.

There are concerns. I believe everyone in this House is genuinely committed to treaty. However, that requires a genuine investment with the Aboriginal community. It is all well and good for us to say, 'Hey, we are going to do a treaty and it is going to be on our terms.' That is not going to work.

I will move to some of our concerns about arts and arts funding. I raise this because the pandemic has had a significant impact on our arts sector. I wrote to the Treasurer, on 12 August. I do not believe I have seen a response at this stage. My letter related to the fact that Tasmania has a very strong and vibrant arts and creative sector that makes an important economic and cultural contribution to our state. However, the industry has been devastated by the impact of COVID-19 with many performances postponed and income forgone.

When we are talking about that, we are not only talking about Tasmanian artists being able to present work locally. There is also the work they might take interstate, or the work that would come when other interstate acts come down. For example, a band that might come down and play at one of our local pubs used to mean that other people within the community who might have the sound equipment would get the work. When they do not come because of the border restrictions, that work is not there for those people and they often do not qualify for very much support, if any at all.

One of the suggestions raised was that the Tasmanian travel voucher scheme, which many people have taken up, and which is very exciting, presents an opportunity for the Tasmanian Government and the community to support the arts sector. We could extend the use of the experience component of the voucher to local arts events, such as theatre and live music performances, which would provide a valuable, significant boost to the arts sector. We want people to be able to participate in those things because we want to build and grow that sector.

The National Association for the Visual Arts has written to every minister around the country calling for those urgent measures to ensure that artists and arts workers have access to vital financial support. They have called for eligibility and inclusion in times of economic crisis.

Time expired.

[6.05 p.m.]

Mr Mr BARNETT (Lyons - Minister for Primary Industries and Water) - Mr Speaker, I am pleased and proud to stand tonight in support of the 2021 Budget and our crucial plans to maintain a vibrant and growing economy. At the outset, I pay tribute to the Premier and Treasurer for his outstanding efforts and exemplary leadership at a time when we have needed it most. The Budget is outstanding. I also pass on my get well soon wishes and I look forward to the Premier's return.

Thank you to the Acting Premier, Jeremy Rockliff, and to the Acting Treasurer, Michael Ferguson. They have done an excellent job in highlighting the importance of the Budget to the rebuilding of our economy and, of course, keeping Tasmanians safe. We have delivered on those two key priorities, not only in this Budget but over the last 16 to 18 months. The economy is critical to the breadth and quality of services the government delivers for households, families, regional communities and businesses. The Budget is about delivering record health services spending, record spending in education and in other key areas of our community.

The Budget is focused on recovery - building resilience, becoming stronger than ever before. In my view, our response in the face of COVID-19 has been appropriate, responsible and strategic. It has been about protecting Tasmania's best interests and supporting a growing economy - and we have delivered. You have seen it in the numbers in the Budget with

economic growth heading to 4 per cent next year and then back to 2 per cent. It is growth. It is not a recession such as occurred, under the Labor-Greens government many years ago.

This past year has been a testing one for all Tasmanians from all walks of life. I could not be prouder of Team Tasmania and the job that this government and our Premier has done in such trying circumstances. Team Tasmania will continue to need this leadership going forward as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and look towards a bright and prosperous future.

As a government we are disciplined, united, responsible and adaptable. We have to pivot when needed, and we have done so. This Budget is all about delivering on jobs and building confidence in the community. We are continuing with the largest and most significant infrastructure program in the state's history, because that is what is being delivered over the next four years - \$5.7 billion infrastructure investment to support those 28 000 jobs as well as providing significant opportunities for Tasmanians as we deliver on our commitments. We are delivering on our promises and a range of experts and others have said so. Michael Bailey from the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:

This is the budget that gets the settings right. It is a budget that manages spending and shows our strong ability to generate revenue.

I am pleased to acknowledge the Standard & Poors Agency reflecting on our growing economy and the fact that we will be moving to an operational surplus in 2023-24. It is good news to have that independent tick of approval to the Tasmanian Budget. Disappointingly, Labor has again not delivered an alternative budget - no plans, no policies, no alternative budget and still too close to the Greens.

We know that they are operating in a toxic environment. Bastian Seidel, the Labor member for Huon, made that very clear in his resignation note demonstrating the bitter internal divisions inside the Labor Party and how the Leader, Ms White, has no control. It is disappointing that there is no alternative Budget and I am putting it on the record.

With regard to the Government and our support for the critical industries, particularly that I represent in the area of trade, agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, energy and emissions reduction and veterans' affairs, I share a few remarks.

More trade, more jobs. We have a \$6 million plan in this Budget over the next four years to deliver increased trade opportunities for Tasmanian businesses alike, small, medium and large. We are backing our export businesses and we have the confidence to further invest, employ and seek those global markets. For the final three years of Tasmania's first trade strategy - and I was there for the launch with the former minister Jeremy Rockliff - we have annual trade action plans, we are agile and nimble, we are moving to expand our markets and create more jobs locally. We have the new Air New Zealand direct flights to Auckland and we have a proposed trade and tourism mission to New Zealand, once health advice and borders allow.

Secure and expanding international business development networks: we have appointed trade advocates in the US, Japan and Singapore, and the plan is working. The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics export data revealed a record. Tasmanian exports hit the \$3.84 billion record in the year to June 2021, exceeding the previous 12-month record: 5.2 per cent increase

on the year to June. The average national growth was 3.5 per cent. This is great news for Tasmania, our exporters and jobs, particularly in those rural and regional areas where we desperately need those jobs. Every job counts.

Agriculture is the life blood of our rural and regional communities, and our primary producers are the backbone of this state. They are delivering in spades. It puts food on the table, not just for us here in Tasmania but across mainland states and territories, and overseas. I say thank you to our farmers and fishers. They work hard every day to produce premium goods sought across the country and the world over.

We are getting on with the job with a visionary and comprehensive plan for the state's agricultural sector, investing \$50 million to accelerate agriculture to that target of \$10 billion farmgate value by 2050. We are on track. It is very good news to be on track and to acknowledge the 7 per cent increase in the previous 12-month period.

Confidence among our agricultural sector and farming communities is at a near record high. It is delivering strong growth across all our productive industries but particularly in agriculture. Today is the day to celebrate. I toasted with the member for Braddon, Felix Ellis, with a glass of milk at lunchtime, to say that we now have a record dairy industry production of 960 million litres of milk, a 1.2 per cent increase from the previous year, which was also a record. Congratulations to the Tasmanian dairy industry. We are proud of you and what you are doing.

We are backing it in in so many different ways. Water is liquid gold and that is why we are investing \$30 million to provide support for water resources and irrigation and \$23.7 million for the next four years to super-size Tranche 3. Those irrigation projects at the Don, Wesley Vale, Sassafras, Northern Midlands, Fingal, Tamar, are going. It is great to be working with the agricultural sector, agri-businesses. They are a key ingredient to success, as is water and access to reliable water being a key ingredient to success.

We have \$5 million on the table for Tasmanian Irrigation to develop a business case for the South East extension. That will be the largest irrigation scheme in Tasmania's history if that comes to fruition, and I hope it will. There is \$1.5 million on the table over four years for the Rural Water Use Strategy, which provides funding support for river health advisory projects and monitoring, metering and management. This is important, and be assured, the health of our rivers is taken very seriously. We have recently established a rural water round table. These are the experts in Tasmania on the wise use of water. I am delighted and honoured to have been there at the meeting just a week or so ago, at their first meeting, and there will be several more meetings between now and Christmas.

We have a strategy. It has taken nearly two-and-a-half years to development the water use strategy - lots of consultation, feedback from the key stakeholders, and we have that train moving in the right direction to protect, promote and support our waterways. Water is liquid gold. We have 1 per cent of Australia's land mass, 12 per cent of Australia's rainfall, and 27 per cent of Australia's water in storage. We have it, it is a natural asset and we want to use it wisely in Tasmania.

We have \$10 million for the new agricultural protection package, supporting a whole range of primary producers and support of the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, Fruit Growers Tasmania, Tasmanian Natural Resource Management bodies - and I met with

NRM South just earlier today - Dairy Tas, Biosecurity Tasmania. What great work they are doing. We have the \$5.6 million for the new community farming partnerships program and \$3 million for the Agricultural Development Fund. That says we have confidence in agriculture. We want to see what you have to offer and we want to help drive that agri-vision to 2050.

We are now creating a nation-leading Tasmanian agricultural precinct in Launceston. We are backing it with \$15 million. We have signed a memorandum of understanding with the university. I thank the Vice Chancellor for his support for that, and for my Department of Primary Industries and Water. The bulk of that department will be heading to Launceston working shoulder to shoulder with the Tas Institute of Agriculture and key stakeholders. I am delighted to be able to advise and provide an update on that. It is the first jurisdiction in Australia to be doing that.

On Saturday, I launched the Strategic Industry Partnership Program with a further \$2 million over four years leveraging the skills and experience of so many key stakeholders. Thanks to those stakeholders who were there at Woolmers on Saturday. Particular thanks to Justin Birchmore, chair of Sprout. He was so positive on behalf of stakeholder colleagues there of the government support. Again, Team Tasmania, working together to get the job done.

There is \$7 million for research, a key ingredient to success in agriculture. We have our research farms on the north-west coast and \$1 million for Fruit Growers Tasmania at Grove, acknowledging the importance of the fruit industry.

Biosecurity: what can be more important in protecting the Tasmania brand, keeping pests and diseases out of Tasmania and ensuring that we have what the rest of the nation wants and needs? Whether it is to do with the livestock sector, managing animal welfare, market access, we have more biosecurity staff on King and Flinders Island, funding support for TFGA for on-farm biosecurity engagement and industry awareness and, also, a new veterinary facility on Flinders Island.

We have confidence that is high. In terms of agricultural production, 14.7 per cent based on the last ABS stats for agricultural production increase. That is fantastic. What is the national average? 1.4 per cent. Tassie, we are gunning it. I am so proud of the sector working together, shoulder to shoulder, to get the job done and producing food on the table for Tasmanians, mainlanders and the rest of the world.

There is no stronger supporter of our iconic seafood industry than the Tasmanian Liberal Government: \$187 million annually, that is what it is worth - regional jobs - and they have done it tough. During COVID-19, we provided a \$5.5 million package of support to the sector, \$660 000-odd support package to the wild fisheries sector including the rock lobster sector, and the trade situation in China has been very challenging.

We have \$3 million on the table to support the Wild Fisheries Action Plan. My thanks to Julian Harrington of the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council. He said he commends the Liberal Government for funding all commitments announced as part of the 2020-21 Budget Building Our Fisheries policy. He went on to thank the Government for understanding the state of their industry and already implementing a \$700 000 seafood processors grant scheme to support seafood.

We are there to support them, shoulder to shoulder, working together with our stakeholders. I am very pleased to wear that T-shirt, 'Eat more Seafood'. I encourage Tasmanians to do so. It is part of the education and awareness campaign and we are certainly backing that. We have the seafood trails website that we are supporting and we will keep doing that.

Likewise with recreational fishing, it is not just me who supports it. There are more than a 100 000 Tasmanians who love it. They love recreational fishing, whether it be sea fishing or inland fishing and we are backing both. We have a 10-year Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy and that will be Tasmania's first ever. We are backing it in because we know it is a part of the Tasmanian way of life. There is \$100 000 to make fishing easier for young people, women, people with disabilities and support for TARfish to the tune of \$400 000 over three years.

The Budget is full of support: \$2 million grant funding for new and upgraded facilities for recreational sea fishing and \$1 million for new and upgraded facilities for inland fishing and, of course, the tagged trout. The Tagged Trout Promotion is working. I caught up with Len and his brother last week at Craighourne Dam and he showed me Lenny's Special, which was the lure he used to catch one of the \$2000 tagged trout. There are 50 of them out there and we have now had four of them caught; fantastic, congratulations and well done. Get out there and enjoy it - 50 waterways, lakes and rivers, the Derwent as well - and try to catch one. It is great to see the increase in the number of young Tasmanians who have taken up that licence already. I caught up with John Diggle yesterday and had an update on that.

When it comes to renewable energy, Tasmania is gunning it. We are the powerhouse of Australia. We are leading the nation and leading Australia in so many ways. We have already hit 100 per cent fully self-sufficient in renewable energy and it has confirmed our status as a world leader. We have a target to be 150 per cent by 2030 and to be 200 per cent by 2040. I cannot help but quote Michael Bailey, CEO of the TTEI: 'What are we doing in renewables is really revolutionary'. He kindly noted that Guy Barnett is just so passionate about renewables. What else did he say:

I have got to say too, I really like the creation of Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania which is under Mr Barnett who is just so passionate about renewables and I think he really is the best energy minister in Australia. He is really driving that for Tasmania. With all seriousness he is doing a great job ... and what we are doing in renewables is really revolutionary.

Of course, I acknowledge Michael Bailey. I am enthusiastic and I am known as the most energetic energy minister in Australia. It is nice to be known as the best energy minister in Australia; I am absolutely honoured.

Ms O'Byrne - You know that this only works when other people say it.

Ms O'Connor - One person thinks you are the best. Control your ego.

Mr BARNETT - This is all because we are backing it in with renewable energy. I have a bit of a response across the Chamber because they have been mute year in, year out, month in, month out but now they are rising.

We have done this all on the back of our Renewable Energy Action Plan. We have consulted widely across the community; we have got our Renewable Hydrogen Action Plan and it is working because we are delivering affordable, reliable, clean electricity.

Zero net emissions for the fifth year in a row, six out of the last seven years and the Premier, the Minister for Climate Change, has made this clear. We have a track record and we are proud of it. We have big plans for Project Marinus, Battery of the Nation and renewable hydrogen. We have plans for Tarraleah, a \$700 million development to double the capacity from 110 megawatts to 220 megawatts subject to further discussions and negotiations with the Australian Government.

It is an exciting time to be in Tasmania and to be part of this future. Renewable hydrogen is Tasmania's super power. I thank those key proponents that are involved; there are many of them including Origin Energy, ABEL Energy, and Grange Resources. They are all involved in that EOI process. Woodside Energy, Fortescue Future Industries thank you for your engagement, consultation and support for our plans for a green hydrogen future in Tasmania. It is all set out in the Renewable Hydrogen Action Plan in the years ahead.

Unfortunately, there are naysayers like the leader, the twice defeated and recently rejected Ms White out there trying to find ways to tear this down, to denigrate, to be negative, to knock-knock-knock. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition forgets the Government and the Hydro are working with a range of proponents for renewable energy and for hydrogen proponents and those are commercial-in-confidence discussions. Ms White forgets that this Government has legislated Tasmania's renewable energy target, which is 200 per cent by 2040.

We have big plans, working with the Bell Bay Advanced Manufacturing Zone. We have amongst the lowest regulated power prices in the nation by 2022 and from 1 July down, down on electricity prices, more than 7 per cent down for residential customers and 11 per cent down for small business regulated power prices. That is a terrific result.

This contrasts with the Labor-Greens - seven years on their watch, what happened? Up, up, up 65 per cent that is what happened over that seven-year period. We have the \$125 winter energy supplement for eligible concession holders. That is about 90 000 Tasmanians, a \$12 million commitment. I am proud of that. That is on top of the \$43 million concession arrangements, the \$30 million we have for the Tasmanian Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme. There is so much in renewable energy and providing support to Tasmanians to deal with the cost of living and the cost of doing business.

I am absolutely proud of mining. There is no greater supporter of the mining and mineral processing sector: 5000 people, more than 50 per cent of our exports, royalties going up and up, more than \$31 million in 2019-20. We are backing it in with a \$3.5 million support package and we are backing it in strongly. This is despite the radical Bob Brown Foundation continuing to protest mining opportunities on the West Coast, together with the support of their parliamentary wing, the Tasmanian Greens -

Ms O'Connor - Blah, blah, blah. Have you told Anthony Houston you think he is a radical?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor.

Mr BARNETT - We will continue to support the productive industries. With respect to the Tarkine I am very pleased that the multiple use of mining, forestry, farming, fishing, conservation measures, recreational measures for the last 150 years have been recognised with the rejection of the BBF's claim for emergency listing.

In forestry, let me make it clear, this is a \$1.2 billion part of our economy; 5700 direct and indirect jobs, incredibly important. Are we backing it in? Too right: \$11.7 million over the next five years. Thanks also to the support of Sustainable Timber Tasmania co-investing we have a \$10 million fund over five years to deliver on-island processing, value-adding, jobs creating in the industry in Tasmania because wood is good. Yes, it is sustainable, recyclable, and renewable. It is the ultimate renewable. Here it is in the Chamber. It is a wood bank but this is a carbon sink. We are surrounded by wood in this Chamber. It is beautiful and I am proud of it, unlike other members in the Chamber from the Greens party.

We have the Tasmanian Timber Promotion Board: \$1.15 million over three years. We want to promote timber. We have the Diversity Action Plan project for both forestry and the mining sector as well. What did the Tasmanian Forest Products Association (TFPA) say about the Budget? Importantly, the Budget recognises -

Ms O'Connor - You ought to get out more. I go into the coupes. You clearly do not.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Can the conversations across the Chamber please stop and allow the minister to be heard in silence.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. They say:

Importantly, the budget recognises the need for more on-island processing and value-adding of forestry products that will support and deliver more jobs and 'The new \$10 million fund over five years will support our growing industry and regional communities by providing support for innovation and excellence in value-adding'.

That is what the association said and I totally agree with them. There is much to say but we will not take lectures from the Labor Party when it comes to our support for forestry because it was the Labor-Greens government -

Ms O'Connor - You are on the Parliamentary Friends of Forestry Industries together, for heaven's sake.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor.

Mr BARNETT - Two-thirds of the jobs were lost. Forestry was taken to its knees. It was decimated. We will not take any lectures from the Labor Party when it comes to supporting our productive industries, whether that be from Shane Broad or the Leader, Rebecca White. It is not on. Year-in, year-out, they voted against our workplace protection legislation to support Tasmanian workers and their right to work to support Tasmanian businesses and their right to operate freely and without impediment, intrusion or interference but, of course, they voted with the Greens and voted it down year-in, year-out.

They will have another opportunity in the very near future. I encourage them to reconsider. Their position was a late call right before the election to say, 'Let's have timber harvesting safety zones and support workplace protection in that space'. What about the miners? What about the farmers? What about those in aquaculture? Big mistake, Labor. You have an opportunity now to reconsider and support Tasmania.

With respect to the attack on the forest industry and the ridiculous and wrong claim by the Greens calling for the end of deforestation in line with the IPCC report, that is wrong. Tasmania does not undertake deforestation. It does not happen in Tasmania -

Ms O'Connor - Rubbish. You are lying.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor.

Ms O'Connor - I withdraw the use of the word 'lying'. The minister is misleading.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - I am sorry that was not followed with an apology.

Ms O'Connor - I will not apologise to you. You are trashing my children's future.

Mr BARNETT - The Greens' effort to say there is deforestation in Tasmania is absolutely wrong. It is incorrect, it is false; it is deceptive. We have a sustainable forest industry. We do not engage in that. Our wood is harvested and our forests are regrown, making it renewable; the ultimate renewable. Let us be very clear. The IPCC published a view that sustainable management of our forests, including a mixed strategy of conservation and timber production is more likely to be optimal for atmospheric carbon reduction. That is very clear. It has been backed by the Food and Agricultural organisation and the International Energy Agency. In fact, it is the view shared by just about everyone except the Greens.

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - I am sorry, minister. I will ask again for the conversations across the Chamber to stop, please.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. The incessant interjections from the Greens are unnecessary.

In terms of veterans, Tasmania has a very long and distinguished military history. The contribution is outstanding. To have 15 of Australia's 101 Victoria Cross recipients is an astonishing record. We pay tribute to the late Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean of Latrobe who was awarded with the Victoria Cross on 1 December last year. Just on the past weekend I have caught up and had a wonderful conversation with Beryl Leonard who was married for more than 76 years to Ray Leonard, the last remaining survivor of the *Armidale* and who knew Teddy Sheean and was there when Teddy went down with the ship. Sadly, Ray passed away just a couple of months ago. Beryl was pleased to receive the Gold Card that I had followed up just a few weeks ago through my office, Matthew Hoffman, to the federal minister. The Gold Card has come through for Beryl Leonard and we can all be absolutely delighted.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr BARNETT - I acknowledge the 'hear, hears' and the support around the Chamber for Beryl having a Gold Card; an acknowledgement of her and, the service of her late husband, Ray Leonard.

We think sadly and reflect on the veterans in Operation Slipper in Afghanistan, a 20-year engagement. Let me say right now, for all of those veterans, the 39 000 Australians who served, the many Tasmanians who served, we honour you, we salute you and we say thank you for your service.

The Tasmanian Government is a strong supporter of Tasmania's veterans and will ensure that their service and sacrifice will not be forgotten. That is why in the Budget we included a record funding of \$1.4 million over coming years for the RSL as a peak body status, the Teddy Sheean VC Memorial grants, the Veterans Retreat at Lake Sorell, the health and wellbeing vouchers, the Headstone projects and the like.

In conclusion, it is a tremendous honour to be the member for Lyons; it is more than half the state, rural and regional parts of Tasmania, working with people like John Tucker, Mark Shelton and others in this great electorate of Lyons. I am very proud.

There is a lot happening. I am backing in the good news of the Hobart to Sorell corridor infrastructure upgrade, \$350 million; police stations at Bridgewater, New Norfolk and St Helens and Longford; school and early learning upgrades at Brighton, Sorell, Bothwell and Campbell Town; the \$96 million tourism developments at Cradle Mountain, Freycinet and Maria Island; \$1 million to commence the resurfacing of Weilangta Road and thank you minister, Michael Ferguson, for supporting that effort and, the \$270 million for the northern prison.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am a proud member of the Gutwein majority Liberal Government. This Budget delivers in so many ways. I am pleased to be part of this Government to deliver a stronger economy, more jobs and opportunities for Tasmanians. It is a great honour and I commend the Budget to this house.

Time expired.

[6.36 p.m.]

Mr JAENSCH (Braddon - Minister for State Growth) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I start by acknowledging the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples, the original owners and custodians of this land and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak on the 2021-22 Tasmanian State Budget, a budget that demonstrates how this Government is investing in our community and taking action to secure Tasmania's future. In these challenging times this is a comprehensive, considered and responsible budget, containing real deliverable commitments and initiatives which reflect the needs of Tasmanians right now, but also, the leadership style and character of our Premier and Treasurer, Peter Gutwein.

This Budget, Mr Gutwein's eighth Budget, will allow us to deliver on commitments across all our portfolio areas, growing the economy and creating jobs whilst supporting our

essential services and ensuring that no Tasmanian is left behind. I congratulate the Treasurer on this Budget and his leadership of our state and hope that he is getting some well-earned rest right now.

The Tasmanian Government recognises the important role that businesses and investment play in the Tasmanian economy and our continuing recovery from COVID-19.

The 2021-22 Budget provides funding to support a range of financial assistance programs and services to Tasmanian businesses to support industry development and economic growth in Tasmania. We have provided a further \$10 million during 2021-22, to extend the existing \$10 million Building Project Support Program to help even more commercial building projects get off the ground in a COVID-19 environment, support jobs and investment in our local economy and provide a future pipeline for the Tasmanian construction sector.

Further support for this sector is provided through the allocation of:

- \$3.6 million over three years to support the delivery of the \$30 million Building Constructions Support Loan Program to assist eligible Tasmanian projects that will engage commercial contraction companies to create new or improve existing buildings and associated infrastructure and that can commence quickly;
- \$6 million over three years to support the provision of a \$100 million interest-free loan to assist Incat with the construction of a large high-speed vessel, securing both a significant local skilled workforce of around 500 jobs, adding 120 more and including 60 apprentices as well as supporting extensive local supply chains in Tasmania;
- \$36 000 is being provided over three years to support the provision of a \$600 000 interest-free loan to PFG Group to construct an 11 metre ultra-durable high-density polyethylene prototype vessel to showcase its unique boat building capabilities and help secure future defence sector contracts for Tasmania;
- \$3 million is also provided over three years to support the delivery of the \$50 million Interest-free Tourism Development Loan Scheme to assist that industry, to improve and enhance their product offerings during this time and by so doing, increase Tasmania's appeal as a must-visit destination as states and national borders re-open; and
- \$834 000 has been allocated over three years to continue the enterprise innovation hubs in Hobart and Launceston, providing certainty to the start-up community through to 2025, with a further \$500 000 to enable enterprise to extend to and operate from the north-west coast for the next four years.

Support programs like these are important policies for Tasmania and they are clearly working. The CommSec State of the States report for July 2021 ranks Tasmania as the best performing economy in Australia for the sixth quarter in a row. The Deloitte Access Economics report said in June that Tasmania's COVID-19 recovery continues to outperform expectations. I am proud to have been given the responsibility as Minister for State Growth of keeping it that way.

As part of this Government's commitment to secure Tasmania's future, we are investing in building Tasmania's circular economy. This Budget highlights the strong action we are taking and further complements existing commitments being delivered through the Tasmanian Government's introduction of a container refund scheme, a state-wide waste levy, support for commercial composting and phasing out single-use and problem plastics in Tasmania by 2025.

We are progressing with our draft Waste Action Plan which provides the foundation for these important reforms to Tasmania's waste management and resource recovery initiatives. The Budget allows us to build on this strategic work so that we can continue promoting sustainable waste to reprocess and reuse materials that would previously have been sent overseas or buried in the ground. The Government remains committed to phasing out single-use plastics from government and council facilities and events held on publicly owned land across the state by 2023, as well as our plan to phase out problematic and unnecessary plastics by 2025.

The Budget includes an investment of \$1 million over the next four years to help achieve this goal, collaborating with local government and supporting businesses through the transition process to address the impacts of plastics in the Tasmanian environment.

We are also providing \$200 000 for a second business resource efficiency program to assist Tasmanian businesses to audit and review their use of resources and generation of waste and find ways to achieve improvements. As we move toward a fully circular economy we are investing \$3 million to partner with industry to invest in a crumb rubber plant to turn end-of-life tyres into material that can be used in the Government's road resurfacing program starting next year.

We know how critical our investment will be in supporting the industry's transition to using recovered materials, which is why we expect to be seeking expressions of interest for a crumb rubber facility in coming months. The Tasmanian Liberal Government has also allocated \$4.5 million from our circular economy fund committed to in the 2020-21 Budget to invest in improving organics collection and reprocessing infrastructure across Tasmania. This investment will help us reach our target to reduce the volume of organic waste sent to landfill by 50 per cent by 2030. We are investing \$3 million in a state-of-the-art composting facility in northern Tasmania. The remaining funds will be used to support feasibility and design work for a similar organic waste solution in the south. This is on top of \$11 million in our Recycling Modernisation Fund grants that I recently announced. These grants were jointly funded by the state and commonwealth governments and including industry's contribution will result in a \$20 million boost to Tasmania's plastic recycling industry.

It is vital that we support businesses investing in state-of-the-art solutions to waste issues that grow our circular economy and promote sustainable practices. The Budget delivers on our plan to do that and create opportunities to drive business and industry development in our state, securing Tasmania's future.

The Budget also includes additional investment in the protection of Tasmania's threatened species. We have reaffirmed our commitment to the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program, extending an additional \$450 000 in annual funding until 2024-25, on top of approximately \$1 million a year previously committed to the program.

The Budget includes \$1 million to progress key actions identified in the swift parrot recovery plan. This will support the ongoing active management and recovery of the species. We are committed to a thorough review of the threatened species strategy and will provide \$300 000 to ensure the review is comprehensive and informed by contemporary science.

I am proud to be the Minister for Environment and of the significant investment our Government is making in our sustainable future through this Budget.

The Government is also delivering on its plan to reform Tasmania's planning system, ensuring we have a contemporary and efficient system that remains a driver of social and economic prosperity in Tasmania.

In line with recommendations made by the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Committee (PESRAC), we have committed to review and comprehensively update our three regional land use strategies. Tasmania's regional land use strategies were designed to facilitate and manage change, growth and development within our state, between 2010 and 2035 and represent the agreed position of all councils when it comes to land use and land use change within their respective regions.

Work has already begun on this update, following an initial investment of \$500 000 in the 2020-21 budget. The 2021-22 Budget allocates an additional \$3.45 million to support further the delivery of this recommendation. It is important that our planning policy unit can deliver the Government's bold planning reforms and priorities. That is why the 2021-22 Budget includes additional funding to the unit of \$700 000 to continue reforms to the Tasmanian planning system.

This includes previous election commitments to deliver Australia's first state-wide planning scheme and the second phase of planning reforms which will establish an integrated program for the regional strategy updates, develop the Tasmanian planning policies and assist local councils to review their residential growth and demand scenarios and settlement structure plans.

An efficient and forward-looking planning system is essential for our state's recovery effort and the wellbeing of Tasmanian communities. The Budget reinforces the Government's commitment to delivering on our plan for the planning reforms that will help to secure Tasmania's future.

The Government is working to ensure the viability, the efficiency and to future-proof our local government sector. There is no doubt that local government is a key driver of place-based, social and economic wellbeing in Tasmania and a key partner in the COVID-19 recovery effort. I thank local government, its elected leaders and its staff at all levels in all parts of Tasmania for the remarkable efforts they have made to lead and to support their communities over the last 18 months and for the extra work they have done to absorb and respond to unprecedented demand for their planning services through the increased number of development applications for housing across Tasmania and for their quick turnaround and their efficient dealing with that demand.

The Government is committed to all the PESRAC recommendations, which include those related to structural reform of the local government sector as part of a broader suite of measures

aimed at further improving public sector capability at all levels in support of the state's economic recovery in the medium term.

We are engaging with the Labor Party, the Tasmanian Greens and the independent member for Clark to seek agreement on the process for reform that PESRAC has recommended. We are allocating \$1 million over two years to implement recommendations 48 and 49 of the PESRAC report. This funding will ensure that the expert panel, supported by a skills-based secretariat, can deliver a report to parliament on the future vision for Tasmania's local government sector. Our investment demonstrates the Government's commitment to ensuring the long-term viability and the continuing contribution of local government to Tasmania's sustainable future.

The Government is committed to delivering better outcomes for Tasmanian Aboriginal people: more opportunity for them and their families and to dignify the relationship with Tasmania's Aboriginal people to achieve a truly reconciled community.

The 2021-22 Budget funds a number of initiatives to support this as we roll out our plan to secure Tasmania's future. Tasmania's former governor, Professor Kate Warner AC, supported by Professor Tim McCormack, are currently engaging directly with Tasmanian Aboriginal people around the state, to find out what the next steps are on our pathway to reconciliation, what they could look like and what is important and meaningful to them.

The 2021-22 Tasmanian Budget provides an initial commitment of \$200 000 for the first stage of this important work and I look forward to seeing the report from Professors Warner and McCormack later this year. We are also committing \$970 000 over two years to support major Aboriginal policy reform initiatives including drafting new Aboriginal heritage legislation and finalising the review into the model for returning land. This follows the finalisation of our review of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975 earlier this year and our commitment to draft a comprehensive new act to provide better protection of Aboriginal heritage in Tasmania.

These initiatives are in addition to other practical measures to support Aboriginal people in Tasmania including locked in funding to support our reset agenda, ongoing funding for Aboriginal liaison officers under the Strong Family, Safe Kids program; support for Aboriginal enterprises such as the wukalina cultural walk; projects to address family violence; new funding to work with Tasmanian Aboriginal people to identify options for further cultural fisheries development in Tasmania; and ongoing funding to support cultural activities in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

All these initiatives complement the recently released Tasmanian Implementation Plan under the historic national agreement on Closing the Gap. This Government will be supporting the plan with an additional \$4 million that will be directed toward building the capacity of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to better meet the needs of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, on top of the existing \$1.3 million committed in last year's budget.

The 2021-22 Tasmanian Budget is securing Tasmania's future and we will continue to work with all Tasmanian Aboriginal people to deliver better outcomes for them and their families right across the state.

I am proud to have been given responsibility for Heritage under the Gutwein Liberal Government. Tasmania's historic heritage places are a key attraction for visitors. During the past year many locals have reconnected with Tasmania's past during their holidays at home. The restrictions due to the pandemic have made it even more important to support these local treasures. They are very important icons of our visitor economy and our state's brand identity.

I am pleased to announce that our election commitment to enter into a \$1.25 million funding agreement with the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority to lead the development of a convict memorial hub at the National Trust's penitentiary chapel in Hobart has been delivered as promised under our 100-day plan, creating another experience to drive visitation to that site and to our state.

The State Budget includes funding to support the work of the National Trust in Tasmania with an additional \$300 000 for this financial year effectively doubling its support. In response, Chairman Nicholas Heyward said that the National Trust (Tasmania) has faced significant challenges as a result of COVID-19 and the various flow on effects to tourism and the economy. He said:

We are thrilled that the Tasmanian Government is backing the Trust with an additional \$300 000 which will enable us to restructure the organisation and continue to work towards an economically sustainable model for Tasmania's largest heritage organisation. We look forward to continuing to celebrate, protect and promote our unique heritage.

We in the Government look forward to working with them to celebrate, protect and promote our unique heritage too.

We also continue to work closely with managers of our World Heritage listed convict sites that received \$2.6 million in stimulus funding from the Australian COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, with the Tasmanian Government contributing \$3 million towards work at the Cascades Female Factory. I was pleased to visit the site recently, to see firsthand, work on the new history and interpretation centre and how it will assist in drawing extra people to the site.

Some of the other initiatives we are supporting to promote and preserve Tasmania's unique and valuable heritage includes \$600 000 over four years for the West Coast Heritage Centre at Zeehan to continue to manage, operate and maintain its unique collection and \$250 000 for painting and maintenance of the iconic, heritage-listed Curry Lighthouse on King Island which is an integral part of the island's skyline and a great tourism drawcard.

There is \$2.8 million in 2022, 2023 and 2024 towards stage three of the Maria Island Rediscovered project, with a total Budget cost of \$6.8 million; \$100 000 for the final stage of interpretive signage at Highfield Historic Site at Stanley; \$665 000 to purchase and renovate St Paul's Anglican Church for the Stanley Discovery Museum; and \$2 million for the Don River Railway to support the volunteer-run vintage railway and museum in Don, to develop a rail experience that will drive interstate and international visitation to the state's north-west.

This Government and Budget recognises that Tasmania's heritage assets are an integral part of the fabric of our state and we will continue to protect and promote them. The Tasmanian Liberal Government took a strong plan to the May election, to secure Tasmania's future in all areas of the state and the 2021-22 Tasmanian Budget confirms we are delivering on our plan

as we promised. For the north-west, for Braddon where I live and which I proudly represent, we will invest in essential services including health and education. We will provide assistance for our most vulnerable, and invest in the all-important Tasmanian way of life.

A few of the significant investments this Government has committed to for this region in this Budget include: \$20 million towards the \$40 million North West Regional Hospital mental health precinct; \$2.6 million for ward upgrades and additional bed capacity at the North West Regional Hospital; \$8 million for the operation and staffing of the North West Regional Hospital linear accelerator; \$9 million for new ambulance vehicles and equipment; \$10 million for the regional health and ambulance facilities fund; \$10.3 million for the new Burnie ambulance station; \$36.4 million for state road upgrades in the north-west and the west coast; \$40 million for the new Burnie Court complex; \$10 million for the Arthur Pieman Conservation area track upgrade program; \$26.6 million for six new child and family learning centres statewide including at West Ulverstone and Waratah-Wynyard.

There is \$15.5 million to construct a brand-new, purpose-built North West Support School including a hydro-therapy pool; \$1.6 million to provide upgrades at the North West Support School in Burnie; \$4.6 million as part of the final stage of the redevelopment of the Devonport High School; \$12.2 million to complete the \$20 million redevelopment of Penguin District High School to a kindergarten to year 12 school; \$7.1 million for the Montello Primary School redevelopment; and TasPorts progressing a \$240 million redevelopment of the Port of Devonport to significantly increase capacity for both freight and vehicles, and to facilitate future growth.

We have also committed to fast-track the process to upgrade the \$145 million Port of Burnie transformation into a dedicated bulk export terminal, increasing capacity for larger boats to berth at the port and ensuring the terminal infrastructure is fit for purpose for the future.

My region, Braddon, is positive and confident. We are 18 months from the onset of this most uncertain, unprecedented time in our living memory. Our region is going strong, our state is going strong. We are performing better than other states and territories around Australia. Our employment rates are at historic highs, and our unemployment rates are at historic lows. Business confidence is booming, and that does not happen by accident. It comes because Tasmanians trust our Government, our Premier and our Budget, to provide for them and to provide the conditions in which they can care for their families, run their businesses, employ Tasmanians and make their way through this uncertain time into a brighter future.

I am proud to be part of a government that has its priorities right, that continues to provide the environment in which Tasmanians can thrive and take confidence in their part of the country's recovery and their ability to provide a living for themselves and their families.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - The time being 7 p.m., the debate is adjourned until tomorrow.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

International Overdose Awareness Day

[7.00 p.m.]

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Minister for Health) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the importance of International Overdose Awareness Day today, August 31. As I said last year, this is a day to shed some light on an important issue and acknowledge those caught by drug addiction or those who accidentally overdose on prescription medication.

The day is recognised around the world by the making of origami paper cranes, and led by the peak body in Tasmania, the Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council (ATDC), who are again championing this day with the making of thousands of paper cranes around the state.

For those who are not aware, it is an ancient Japanese legend that if you fold 1000 cranes, or *senbazuru*, you will be granted a wish by the gods; happiness or good luck. By making a crane as part of this day, you are encouraged to remember Tasmanians lost to overdose as well as wish for our community to be free from the harm of overdose.

As the peak alcohol and other drugs body, the ATDC, has pointed out it is a sad fact that more Tasmanians die each year from unintentional overdose than from motor crashes. Unintentional drug-induced deaths in Australia are increasing each year. While some in the community may imagine an overdose death is that of someone caught in an illicit drug addiction, it is most likely to occur to someone on prescription medication. That is why it is so important to have open and honest conversations about overdose. The more people who know and hear of this, the more likely we are to be aware and encourage everyone, our loved ones, friends and the wider community to be careful with the medications they take.

At the moment, our Government is working on a number of programs to address the harms of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, including developing a new Tasmanian Drug Strategy 2021-27. We have committed to ongoing funding of the Opioid Overdose Prevention Program of free take-home naloxone through the Needle and Syringe Program and Alcohol and Drug Services. We are continuing with the implementation of our 10-year reform agenda for the alcohol and other drugs sector in Tasmania, to which we have so far committed some \$4.9 million. In the Budget last week, we announced a further \$10 million for a range of community sector organisations that provide alcohol and drug treatment services.

With regard to today, the ATDC has once again led numerous organisations in the making of thousands of paper cranes. In 2019, more than 4000 were created; in 2020 that rose to more than 5700. This year, the ATDC has partnered with Anglicare Tasmania Youth and Family Connections and the Launceston City Mission to lead paper crane-making sessions and produce three interactive artworks in the north west, the north and the south of the state. These artworks were unveiled today in Devonport, Launceston and Hobart. I have seen pictures of them.

International Overdose Awareness Day is a day to acknowledge there is more we can all do to prevent unnecessary death by overdose in Tasmania, and I encourage everyone to do so. For anyone who may be listening to tonight's speech or reading my contribution, if this has raised concerns for yourself or a loved one, I encourage you to seek help by contacting the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015 or Tasmanian Lifeline on 1800 984 434.

Stage Right Youth Theatre - *SpongeBob SquarePants*

[7.04 p.m.]

Ms FINLAY (Bass) - Mr Speaker, I rise tonight to celebrate much that is great about northern Tasmania, particularly Launceston and the local theatre community. In the last couple of weeks, I have had the pleasure to attend a number of performances in Launceston's beautiful Princess Theatre, both of young people, people experienced and emerging in the local theatre scene.

I acknowledge Stage Right Youth Theatre and their recent presentation of *SpongeBob SquarePants*. You might think a performance with such a title might only interest and give pleasure to younger members of our community. However, I can attest that myself and many other family members and adults of the Launceston community, including my father at 80, who is a very direct feedback provider of local theatre, loved it. Danny Gibson, the leader of Stage Right Youth Theatre Company, with the young people aged between eight and 18, put on an incredible performance of quite remarkable talent. It is extraordinary that the young people of our community have such developed professionalism on the stage, strong vocals, strong dancing but also all of the back-of-house elements that are often provided by young people from our community, whether it be stage management, lighting or helping with costumes. There was no doubt that *Spongebob Squarepants* was a delight for Launceston.

Following up a couple of days ago, I attended the Scotch Oakburn College performance of *Shrek*, again an incredible performance that demonstrated great talent from that school community and put together a large number of students from across the full spectrum of the school.

This evening, celebrating the contribution arts make to community, there is no doubt that a young person who takes the courage to endeavour into a creative performance learns a lot and can contribute to their academic outcomes, their social outcomes and their ability to contribute to our community. I stand to celebrate those contributions and also to acknowledge that Encore Theatre Company who, unfortunately in 2020, only days prior to going live in the theatre with *Mamma Mia*, had to stand down the company because of the impacts of COVID-19. What I love is that they relaunched this event. Tickets are live. Actually, tickets are fast running out, as always with Encore Theatre Company performances. That performance starts in October in Launceston and I know will be well loved and has been much anticipated by the Launceston community.

That is local theatre, local arts in Launceston. Also, tonight, I want to do a shout-out to Junction Arts Festival, tomorrow night launching in the beautiful Prince's Square in Launceston and it will extend right across our community. This is the 10th anniversary in and around Launceston. It says a lot about an arts organisation that continues to grow, continues to expand and create and offer such a diverse program over a long period of time. It is not easy and it is particularly not easy right now to deliver arts events and performances, to deliver great festival experiences in the current environment.

To the team at Junction Arts Festival, sorry, myself and others who would normally be there to celebrate with you cannot be with you tomorrow night. We wish you well, looking forward to the experiences over the weekend. I just wanted to stand this evening and celebrate all that is great about northern Tasmania, particularly centred in Launceston, about our wonderful arts community.

South Hobart Primary School - Library

[7.08 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, I want to warmly endorse Ms Finlay's contribution and also acknowledge the value of the arts in our culture and in nourishing our spirituality.

On a related issue, I want to talk about books and learning and libraries. What a joy libraries are. They are places of calm, of inquiry, they are enriching places where we deepen our knowledge and understanding. For children who are learning, libraries are invaluable. This brings me to the issue of the South Hobart Primary School's lack of a library.

Last year in Estimates, Dr Woodruff raised the issue of the South Hobart Primary School library and this matter has, regrettably, not been resolved. I also spoke to the minister about it at the time. In the last decade the South Hobart Primary School population has grown astronomically, from 243 students in 2010 to around 500 students this year. That is nearly doubled in size and that is because this once little school is a great school, and parents and students are voting with their feet. But that has put pressure on school infrastructure.

In November 2020 it was announced that the South Hobart Primary School library would be shut to accommodate two new classrooms for the ever-growing school population. The proposal was that the school library would be relocated to a shed in the car park and a book trolley would visit classrooms each week. The parents at South Hobart Primary School, as well as the students, were understandably upset. A total of 1217 parents signed a change.org petition calling on the then Education minister to ensure the students did not lose their library, their place of reading and learning. We raised the matter with the former Education minister in November and December last year and we thought that it was being resolved.

Mr Rockliff assured us and the South Hobart parents that it was temporary and that the Government would begin a master plan to tackle the growing school population. Ultimately the South Hobart Primary School students lost their library and they do not have it back in this year's budget.

In March this year the master plan was circulated and South Hobart Primary School was put on the priority one list for infrastructure upgrades, including new classrooms. Despite that there was nothing for South Hobart Primary School in the state budget, nothing this year or in the forward Estimates. You can imagine how gutted the South Hobart school community and the students are about this. What we know is that if work does begin on the master plan it will start sometime in the 2025-26 year at the earliest on the Budget papers. The South Hobart Primary School, as we know, has nearly doubled in a decade. The population pressure is there. There is a clear and pressing need to invest in the infrastructure of this beautiful growing school.

The South Hobart Primary School Association has expressed great disappointment in the state Budget. I quote from the Association's Facebook page:

The School Association is very disappointed that the state Budget for 2021-22 does not contain funding for infrastructure in our school. Obtaining funding for implementation of the master plan we have developed collaboratively remains a strong focus for the School Association. We are

disappointed that our approaches to local representatives and the minister did not involve funding in this year's Budget.

It was such a significant issue that the principal recently wrote to parents about the failure to fund upgrades. The principal says:

Dear families, many of you will have seen the state Budget for 2021-22 handed down yesterday. It did not contain any capital works funding for South Hobart Primary School. While our school has been listed as a priority one site for capital investment, I have been advised that for this Budget a total of 24 schools were listed as priority one sites, including our school, and funding requests were received for all of these. There were also an additional 80 capital submissions from other schools not assessed as priority one.

The letter goes on to assure parents that the principal and the school community will keep working towards having the library reinstated. I would be very interested to see the allocation of funds north and south for schools that needed extra funding for infrastructure.

The South Hobart Primary School mother who contacted our office, whose two children are currently at the school and whose third child starts kindergarten next year, said:

Given they were already using the library for classrooms maybe they will have to put Alfie in the attic.

We are not sure South Hobart Primary School has an attic but we take her point. The reality is, however, that four year old Alfie will be almost finished primary school by the time the upgrades at South Hobart Primary School happen on this Government's timeline. Both the former Education minister and the new minister have rightly talked about improving literacy rates. Shutting libraries and failing to plan for obvious population growth in schools is not the way to fix that.

We are calling on the new Education minister to have a focus on the South Hobart Primary School's needs. You have a school population that has doubled in a decade, in fact more than doubled in a decade and you have children who have had their library taken away in order to fit more students into that space. Those children still do not have their library back. They still do not have that sanctuary for quiet learning that is so important to the development of young children's minds and to their education.

We believed after last year's Estimates that in this Budget there would be something for South Hobart Primary School. So did the South Hobart Primary School community. They have been badly let down. We strongly encourage the new minister to make sure that funding is allocated at least in next year's Budget to make sure that the school can meet its growing student needs but also to make sure those kids get their beautiful library back.

Theatre Royal and Hedberg Performing Arts Complex

[7.15 p.m.]

Ms ARCHER (Clark - Minister for the Arts) - Mr Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the recent official opening of The Hedberg performing arts complex on 9 of August. I congratulate

everyone who has worked so hard over many years, to deliver this much anticipated artistic, creative and cultural hub in the heart of Hobart.

There have been a couple of contributions tonight in relation to the arts. I note Ms Finlay's contribution to Junction Arts Festival and the fact that many of us cannot be at the opening tomorrow because of parliament. Due to Estimates preparations and some commitments in my electorate, I cannot be there this year. I hope some northern members get along on the weekend and support that.

In relation to The Hedberg complex, things got complicated due to COVID-19. We were finally able to officially open The Hedberg on 9 August. As Minister for the Arts, I acknowledge that Tasmanian culture is one of our most treasured assets.

Our culture is an expression of who we are and what it means to be Tasmanian. We are a growing state with our own unique story to tell. In many ways, we do that through the arts. Our Tasmanian cultural landscape is full of passionate creators, performers and practitioners. It is important that we have facilities and venues that can foster and showcase their excellence. The Hedberg represents a transformational redevelopment of the historic Theatre Royal precinct, which encompasses the historic Theatre Royal and the University of Tasmania.

I acknowledge the significant contribution of Tim Monroe, the Theatre Royal's CEO. He has held that role, going completely off memory now, since 2004. He was previously operations manager and prior to that, in the very early days, a performer and a backstage and lighting specialist. He is stepping out of that role and we welcome Simon Wellington to that role. We held a function for Tim last night on the stage at the Theatre Royal to acknowledge his contribution to the Theatre Royal and The Hedberg complex and navigating the Theatre Royal's way through all of the changes that have occurred there.

The Hedberg project was delivered through a partnership between the Tasmanian and Australian governments -

Ms O'Connor - Labor-Greens government.

Ms ARCHER - to the University of Tasmania and the Theatre Royal. It was actually our Government that delivered the funding and signed up to it.

Ms O'Connor - It was the Labor-Greens government that initiated it, which you did not have the grace to say at the launch.

Ms ARCHER - It was in its very embryonic stages when we came to Government, Ms O'Connor.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor. You do not always get the last say.

Ms ARCHER - I did acknowledge the contribution. Ms Giddings was there and I did acknowledge the contribution. I can easily dig out my speech. I am careful to always acknowledge those things. It was a later partnership and the funding was through our Government.

Each partner, unequivocally, was committed to developing a world-class destination for artists, practitioners, educators and students and the community. The project comprised improvements to the Theatre Royal, including state-of-the-art backstage facilities and a new studio theatre which replaces the old backstage theatre and a new home for the university's Conservatorium of Music and performance venues in public spaces.

The Hedberg is the latest edition to Hobart's creative precinct, which includes the Theatre Royal, the Federation Concert Hall, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the University of Tasmania's campuses including the Centre for the Arts in Hunter Street and the Media School in Salamanca Square.

Given the size of this significant project, delivering The Hedberg has been an ongoing and complex feat. Even at the best of times, it would be anticipated that such a task would be challenging. Over the last 18-months, the impacts of COVID-19 have meant that access for FIFO workers and material supply chains have been affected. As a result, the project completion date has been renegotiated several times.

The completion of the project is testament to the hard work, collaboration and commitment of many stakeholders. We can all be very proud of what has been achieved on the site for all Tasmanians to enjoy.

It was in late 2012 that it was announced that a creative industry and performing arts facility would be constructed on what was then the vacant block next to Australia's oldest working theatre, the Theatre Royal. At that stage, there was not a commitment for funding, which was what I was attempting to point out before. In 2013 Liminal Architecture with their Singaporean partners, WOHAR Architects, were awarded the bid to deliver what was known then as the Creative Industries and Performing Arts Development. I acknowledge Liminal Architecture, Elvio Brunesi and Peter Heffernan, for their incredible work on this project. It goes far beyond the architecture and design with their input into this project. The appointment of a locally based architecture studio to lead a project of this scale and significance was a first in Tasmania and, given the finished project, I am very confident it will not be the last.

The Tasmanian Government is committed, as I have said on numerous occasions, to supporting Tasmania's cultural and creative industries. We were very proud to provide \$30 million in support for this particular project. In addition, we have provided increased funding to the Theatre Royal to assist them with operating their new facilities. It is certainly not the organisation it was when Tim Munro first took over. We were reflecting on that last night. We have certainly given them an injection of funds to ensure that they can operate their new facilities.

Their Hedberg development is now very well placed to play a key role in enhancing Tasmania's position as a leader across the creative, performing and digital arts and will no doubt make a substantial contribution to our state's economic, educational and cultural landscape going forward. As both Minister for the Arts and a proud local member for the electorate of Clark in which the Hedberg is located, I want to sincerely thank and congratulate all those involved in bringing this ambitious and highly worthwhile project to fruition. I look forward to seeing the Hedberg play a pivotal role in fostering Tasmanian creativity and artistic endeavour in many years to come.

Young Farmers and Young Farmer of the Year

[7.21 p.m.]

Mr BARNETT (Lyons - Minister for Primary Industries and Water) - As Minister for Primary Industries and Water and member for Lyons I am pleased and proud tonight to share a few remarks with respect to our young farmers and the Northern Midlands. A couple of events have occurred recently, in particular on Friday 13 August, an event hosted by the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association at JJs Bakery and Old Mill Café in Longford and attended by many young farmers.

Congratulations to Marcus McShane, the President of the TFGA and John McKew, the CEO who both presented and spoke on the evening, supported by Sam Wedgwood, and members of the TFGA board. I acknowledge as well the support of Janie Finlay, the shadow minister for primary industries and water. We had an excellent night. It was well received.

It was so good to be encouraged and to be inspired by those young farmers. It was a productive and casual engagement. I was very pleased to attend and to have confidence in our agricultural communities because of our young farmers. They are our future. Agriculture is the backbone of our rural and regional communities. They are delivering in spades with a 14 per cent increase in the last ABS statistics in terms of agricultural production compared to the national average of a 1.4 per cent increase. We are kicking goals in Tasmania. We have got a bold target of an annual farmgate value of \$10 billion by 2050. We are on track with the state Budget delivering a \$50 million package of support, the most comprehensive and visionary package that we have seen in recent decades.

Ms O'Connor - Unless you believe in science. Have you seen the river health report?

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr BARNETT - I want to refer to the following night, an event hosted by Rural Youth Tasmania, the Young Farmer of the Year competition. It was a fantastic event and congratulations to Rural Youth Tasmania for hosting that event at Quercus Rural Youth Park. Again I was joined by Janie Finlay, my shadow minister. We both enjoyed it.

I was also joined by Kate, my wife, and many others. The place was full. It was full of excitement. There were run-offs held at the Hagley Farm Primary School, my former school, as you know; I am an old boy there. I was there on Saturday 25 June where I saw up close the work and effort of these young farmers. I saw them in action. I was very impressed with their skills in the different disciplines that they undertook during that day. They have a key role in growing agriculture and building a prosperous future. Thank you to the sponsors and judges of the event. I was one of the judges for the public speaking with Wayne Johnson and a representative from Nutrien Ag Solution. They were the key sponsor.

I give a special call out to Andrea O'Halloran, who was named the Young Farmer of the Year. Andrea works on the East Tamar and has performed so well. The runner-up was Caitlin Radford from an outstanding list of competitors. I again congratulate both of them on their achievements.

Caitlin, earlier in the year, was Apprentice of the Year for Australia.

Mr Ellis - Hear, hear.

Mr BARNETT - That commitment was made in Canberra all those months ago. I hear a 'hear, hear' from another Wesley Vale resident. Caitlin lives at Wesley Vale. I was delighted to judge that public speaking round of the competition.

Congratulations to Jake Williams, the president of Rural Youth Tasmania, for his efforts together with all the volunteers and committee members. We take our hat off to Rural Youth Tasmania for hosting AgFest every year.

I also spent time at the Longford Men's Shed. They are doing a terrific job. I caught up with the president of the Longford Men's Shed, Denis Pitt, and other members on Thursday, 5 August. I caught up with Bob Thomas. He was the winner of the 2020-21 Tasmanian Volunteer Awards Community Care and Health Volunteer Award. He was the founding president of the Longford Men's Shed when he moved to the area 12 years ago. There were no sheds in the area and only 14 in the state. Now we have 65 sheds. They do a terrific job for mental health and wellbeing in our rural and regional communities.

Ms O'Connor - Hear, hear.

Mr BARNETT - I say congratulations to the Men's Shed Association and all those involved. I am keen to support them whenever I can, whether it is with a tin of Milo when I drop by or just a cheerio or a catch-up coffee or a cup of tea.

It was great to catch up with the Northern Midlands Council recently to hear of their plans for the future and for me to outline some of the commitments we made at the election. The Evandale Football Club and the cricket club have those expanded facilities. They are great for women and young girls. The scoreboard is working so brilliantly. Congratulations to all the volunteers on the committee. We have given funding commitments to the railway bridge at Longford. Nigel Birch, Dick Adams and others are pleased with that commitment.

We have funding support for the Perth dog park, for the Perth Recreation Ground behind the goal post nets. I was there at a footy game a couple of months ago and they are needed because the ball goes flying through the goals and out into public space outside the ground.

I look forward to working with the Northern Midlands Council, yourself, Mr Speaker, and John Tucker and others to advance Tasmania's interest in the Northern Midlands.

Comments made by Ms O'Connor

[7.29 p.m.]

Mr ELLIS (Braddon) - Mr Speaker, in this place the Leader of the Tasmanian Greens on a matter of public importance declared that the Prime Minister belongs to a death cult.

Ms O'Connor - Yes, he does.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ELLIS - When asked to withdraw, she said that she would not under any circumstances.

Ms O'Connor - I will not.

Mr ELLIS - Mr Speaker, I rise tonight to make a point that that is a disgraceful attack on our Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, and his family.

Ms O'Connor - I am stating a fact.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, order.

Mr ELLIS - One of the things that I also wanted to raise is that I believe it is a sad reflection of a creeping, hateful, anti-Christian intolerance.

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, I take offence to that statement. I attend the parliamentary prayer breakfast and I have many contacts with leaders in the Christian community. I ask Mr Ellis to withdraw that statement.

Mr SPEAKER - It was a general statement. I did not see that it was directed to anybody but if you have taken offence -

Ms O'Connor - He is saying I am anti-Christian which is untrue.

Mr ELLIS - Mr Speaker, purely a comment about what I believe to be a trend in our society. Whether it was implied by the Leader of the Greens, particular words in that moment, I think it speaks to a broader trend so I will not withdraw. Sadly, I think it is becoming a badge of honour for some people in our society.

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order. Mr Speaker, I stated really clearly that I took personal offence to Mr Ellis's statement. Frequently, I am asked to withdraw statements and I just do. What I said about Pentecostalism is true. It is a death cult and I asked Mr Ellis to withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor. You cannot take a personal offence to a general comment. Mr Ellis is allowed his view, the same as you are allowed yours. It was a general comment. I cannot force Mr Ellis to withdraw a general comment.

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Speaker.

It is an intolerance that seems to not apply to other religions. It is not something that would even be thought of or countenanced, and nor should it be, for religions such as Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, or many of the great religions of the world.

Ms O'Connor - Are you saying Christians are more persecuted?

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor.

Mr ELLIS - I personally believe that it does not take a heck of a lot of courage to attack a religion whose leader preached to his followers to turn the other cheek.

Ms O'Connor - Pentecostalism does not represent Jesus.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor. You do not get to interject. A member is on his feet and you are asked not to interject when another member is on their feet.

Mr ELLIS - Personal spirituality, whether it is through organised religion, whether it is through other important parts of life, which speak to a higher plane of human experience should be respected, whatever that looks like, whoever it comes from, whether it is the Prime Minister of Australia or a little child in Tasmania. In these congregations there are families, there are children, there are people who are about to die who believe that it is important for their eternal destiny. Pentecostalism, which the Leader of the Greens raised in particular as a 'death cult', seems to have come under significant attack from a lot of these people. A lot of it seems to be based on misunderstanding which sadly seems to be in many cases deliberate. It is a part of Christianity that emphasises a personal relationship with God and the power of the Holy Spirit to act in ways in the world and to make the world a better place. There are 500 million people around the world who believe in that particular branch of Christianity. Through their hands so much great work is done, whether it is curing the sick, caring for the aged and infirm; or providing jobs, housing and education for people of all walks of life.

Fundamentally, Christianity is at the bedrock of our society but more important than that it is the foundation of liberalism and tolerance that we have here in Australia and across the west based on that unique and very ancient Judeo-Christian idea that we are all made in the image of God. There is a powerful part of the Bible: Paul's letters to the Galatians (3:28) that says: 'There is no Jew or Gentile nor slave nor free nor is there male or female for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.

Now, if that is not the fundamental basis of tolerance to live by in our society, I do not know what is. So may we, 21 centuries later, continue to reflect this wisdom of tolerance and in this place, by our words and deeds, do the same.

The House adjourned at 7.35 p.m.