



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

REPORT OF DEBATES

Tuesday 17 September 2024

REVISED EDITION

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Tuesday 17 September 2024

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Member for Mersey - Mr Gaffney

[11.02 a.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) (by leave) - Mr President, I move -

That the honourable member for Mersey, Mr Gaffney, be granted a leave of absence from the service of the Council for this week's sitting.

Motion agreed to.

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS

Mr PRESIDENT - Honourable members, being Tuesday, it is Special Interest day. I welcome to the President's Reserve today Mark Green, Kylie Driessen, Rhianna Driessen and Joe Green. They are guests of the member for Elwick, who is first up with her Special Interest Matter this morning.

I say hello to Mark. I had the tremendous pleasure of going on the Frank MacDonald excursion many years ago with Mark, who was the government representative. We had a very good time. I am sure all members will join me in welcoming the member for Elwick's guests to the Chamber today.

SPECIAL INTEREST MATTERS

Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection

[11.03 a.m.]

Ms THOMAS (Elwick) - Mr President, thank you for extending that lovely welcome to my guests in the Chamber this morning. Thank you to my guests for being here.

I rise today to raise awareness of the need for further research into spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD), which is the number-one cause of heart attacks in women under the age of 50. I forewarn that I will be sharing the story of someone who died from this condition.

Spontaneous coronary artery dissection is a condition that occurs when a tear forms in one of the inner layers of the blood vessels of the heart. This tear can slow or block blood flow to the heart, causing a heart attack, abnormalities in heart rhythm, and/or death. Women in their 40s and 50s are most at risk of SCAD, although it can occur at any age. It can also be

experienced by men. The majority of people who develop SCAD are healthy with no known risk factors of heart disease, such as high blood pressure, diabetes or high blood cholesterol.

Responsible for around 25 per cent of heart attacks in women under the age of 50, SCAD is the most common cause of heart attack for women who are pregnant or have just given birth.

Research also shows that anxiety, stress and depression are more common in women after they have had a SCAD heart attack than in those who have had an ordinary or traditional heart attack.

Joining us here today in the Chamber are Mr Mark Green and his son, Joe, who sadly lost their wonderful mum and wife Rowanne in 2020. At the age of just 50, Row tragically passed away after suffering a SCAD heart attack. I also acknowledge Row's sister, Kylie, and her daughter, Rhianna, and thank them for also joining us today. Unfortunately, Larissa, who is the daughter of Mark and Row, is unable to attend today due to school commitments.

Yesterday was the four-year anniversary of Row's death. I thank Mark for his courage in sharing Row's story with me to share with you to help raise awareness of SCAD with the aim of saving lives.

In mid-2020, Mark and Row lived with their two children in New Town. Row had recently celebrated her 50th birthday and, like many other Tasmanians in the midst of the COVID pandemic, she took the opportunity to be outside and enjoy a walk with the family dog. Upon her return, Row told Mark that she felt some discomfort in her chest. Both felt it was not too much to worry about as she was fit and healthy. However, when Row's condition did not improve, she went to the after-hours emergency department at Calvary Hospital.

Unfortunately, COVID restrictions meant that Mark could only drop off Row at the hospital. After some tests, it was discovered she was experiencing an abnormality with her heart. It was subsequently diagnosed as SCAD and she needed to have emergency surgery. Row rang Mark and said she needed to go to the Royal Hobart Hospital for assessment and treatment. Later that evening, doctors at the hospital called Mark to say Row would need a relatively common operation. Unfortunately, Row's operation did not go as expected.

When surgeons attempted to repair the tear, more tears occurred, causing major complications. Mark received a phone call from the doctor to tell him that Row's heart was unable to be repaired sufficiently to function on its own and she was to be taken to the ICU and put on life support.

No-one knew what the next hours and days would reveal and it was a terribly traumatic time for Mark and his family. Row required high-level care and was flown from Tasmania to the ICU at The Alfred in Melbourne, where it was revealed that she would ultimately need a heart transplant. Devastatingly for Mark and the children, COVID restrictions meant they could not accompany her and had to stay in Tasmania.

Despite the best medical care, Row did not recover. She was flown back to Hobart to spend her last precious days with family before her life support was switched off, leaving Mark, their two children and broader family to navigate life without their much-loved wife, mum, sister, aunt and friend.

During the many weeks that Row was in ICU in Melbourne, Mark made hundreds of phone calls to The Alfred Hospital. These calls involved long periods of time when Mark was on hold, often spending hours listening to the same generic on-hold music.

After Row's passing, Mark found himself having to contact many different organisations and found himself listening to that same generic on-hold music used by The Alfred Hospital. These moments were hugely triggering for Mark, taking him back to the gut-wrenching and uncertain moments when he would call The Alfred to check on Row's condition. Many times he simply could not continue with the call.

Indicative of Mark's altruistic nature, he realised there would be others having this same experience. He wrote to The Alfred asking if the hospital would consider changing its on-hold music. To Mark's surprise, he was contacted by The Alfred Health's Chief Digital Health Officer, Amy McKimm, who not only promised to change the on-hold music but also to commission an original composition as a lasting legacy to Row.

Amy asked for Mark's help to create something in Row's honour that would capture Row's kind and caring nature. Amy was put in touch with composer Jessica Wells and together Mark and Jess created a beautiful composition called *A Portrait of Row*. In what is a wonderfully touching outcome in the face of immeasurable grief, *A Portrait of Row* now plays on The Alfred Health's telephone system to promote a sense of peace, calm and healing.

A Portrait of Row is an amazing legacy to an amazing woman who touched so many people with her kindness, warm nature and willingness to help others.

In Mark's words:

She lit up our lives like a billion stars. If this piece of music helps people to have a moment of calm, it's done its magic, and that would be Row.

Mr President, I would also like to acknowledge Mark's selfless efforts in raising awareness of SCAD and assisting the SCAD Research Inc and the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute to raise valuable funds for life-saving research to help beat this condition. To this end, I encourage everyone to learn more about SCAD and join me and Mark in the 2024 SCADaddle for Research at Cornelian Bay on Sunday 27 October or sponsor our fundraising efforts if you cannot join us. Participants can either walk, skip, run - or dance, I suppose - the 5-kilometre track with family and friends to help raise awareness of SCAD and raise funds for more research into risk factors and preventative measures.

Thank you to some of my colleagues who have worn red today, which is the colour of the SCAD research effort. Thank you to those who have worn red in solidarity. Thank you, Mark, for what you have done to help others and continue to do to help others - and for allowing me to share your story here today. I look forward to the walk with you on 27 October. Thank you everyone.

Members - Hear, hear.

Tresca Community Centre

[11.11 a.m.]

Ms PALMER (Rosevears - Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, thank you to the member for Elwick for a beautiful contribution. It is special for Row's family to be here today. My deepest condolences for your loss.

Today I am excited to share with you the remarkable story of the Tresca Community Centre. This centre is a beacon of community spirit and a real testament to what can be achieved when people come together with a common purpose. Located in the heart of Exeter in the West Tamar, the Tresca Community Centre has lived many lives. Yet at its core, it is more than just a building; it is a hub that serves as a backbone for local life.

It was built around 1910 by Mrs Francis Reed and her son Eric as a private home that was situated on farmland. It became an important meeting place for groups such as the Masonic Lodge, Country Women's Association, the local drama group and the music society.

After World War II, Tresca was purchased by the Department of Education and a farm school was established on some of the land. It has also been home to the Fairbridge centre for child migrants from the United Kingdom, the first of its kind to house boys and girls together. It even hosted the first Exeter Carols by Candlelight on its beautiful verandah.

Tresca has been at the centre of life in the West Tamar for more than 100 years with no plans to stop anytime soon.

One of the standout features of the Tresca Community Centre is its Men's Shed. It is a true gem in our West Tamar community and it is filled with true gems. As we know, Men's Sheds provide a welcoming space for men of all ages to gather, work on projects and share skills in a relaxed and supportive environment. It is more than just a workshop, it is a place where friendships are formed, mental health is supported and lifelong skills are taught. Whether it be woodworking, metalworking or just having those all-important cups of tea and a chat, the Men's Shed offers a sense of purpose and camaraderie that is invaluable.

I have visited there a number of times - most recently just a few months ago. I was astounded at the workmanship of these men; so much so that while I was there I purchased a house-warming present for my son Henry and his partner, Emily. It was a chamber pot stool and it is what every house needs.

The Tresca Community Centre is a place where people of all ages and backgrounds come together. Its diverse range of facilities and programs cater to the needs of the community, foster inclusivity and engagement. From afternoon art classes to Tai Chi and mah-jong, the centre is a hive of activity, offering something for everyone.

In addition to its cultural contributions, the Tresca Community Centre plays a crucial role in supporting education and personal development. It offers a range of educational programs and workshops designed to enhance skills and knowledge: cooking classes, a computer skills workshop and sewing classes. The centre is dedicated to lifelong learning and personal growth.

The centre also serves as a vital resource for those in our community who are in need. It provides support services such as counselling and referral services. In times of hardship, the

centre is a place where individuals and families can find assistance, compassion and an all-important sense of belonging.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of volunteers and staff members who give their time and energy to make the centre a thriving community hub. Their passion and commitment are the driving forces behind the centre's success and the positive impact it has on the lives of so many.

At the heart of the centre's success is Ingrid O'Neill, the centre's leader. Ingrid brings a wealth of experience and passion to her role, ensuring that the centre not only meets but exceeds the expectations of the community it serves. Her ability to connect with people, to understand their needs, to never judge a person's circumstances but to always be welcoming is really special. Ingrid's influence extends beyond the daily operations. She has been the driving force behind many of the centre's key programs and initiatives, including the expansion of the Men's Shed and various community outreach projects.

As we look to the future, we also look at the past. From history, we know that Tresca can continue to evolve and adapt to meet the changing needs of our beautiful West Tamar community. It remains a brilliant example of how community spirit and collaboration can create a space that truly makes a difference.

In finishing, next time you are in Exeter, I invite each one of you to visit the Tresca Community Centre, participate in its programs and engage with its vibrant community. How special it is today for me to be able to celebrate and support this remarkable centre. Thank you.

FORESTRY (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL 2024 (No. 20)

Third Reading

Bill read the third time.

MOTION

Budget Papers and Appropriation Bills (No. 1 and No. 2) 2024 - Noting

Continued from 12 September (page 29).

[11.18 a.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I do not envy the Treasurer having to prepare this year's Budget. It is never an easy task to navigate the economic challenges that we face as a state. It is often very difficult to prioritise and choose between meeting the ever-increasing immediate demand for government services and ensuring the correct strategies are in place to ensure our long-term future.

This year is no exception. The pressures encountered in addressing the areas of concern that Tasmanians rightly expect to be addressed, while at the same time being mindful of

responsible government spending levels, are as prevalent as ever. Things are made even more difficult in the context of rising inflation and a softening national economy.

In this year's Budget, there is also provision made for the response to the commission of inquiry. The budget provides \$423 million over four years to fund all 191 recommendations from the commission of inquiry. There is recognition of the \$646.9 million liability to cover the cost of future redress and civil claims of child sexual abuse in state care.

As the Treasurer said in his speech, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to respond with justice and empathy to the horrors of child sexual abuse; the government is to have credit for that and is determined to do so.

The preparation of a state budget is a complicated and difficult job. There are many important factors and competing obligations to be weighed and considered. As with most things in life, it is about getting the balance right. I believe that this is a budget that, overall, does get the balance right.

The government is focused on the things that matter for most Tasmanians. The prioritisation of health, cost-of-living relief, education and housing, and building infrastructure as key issues is reflective of a simple position adopted by the government. That is this: the priorities of Tasmanians are the priorities of the government. What matters to everyday Tasmanians is what matters for the government. That is the way it should be.

As is usual in presenting my contribution on the budget, I think it is useful to briefly examine a few performance indicators around our present economic position. It gives a bit of a context. It is true that economic statistics, like all statistics, can be presented in a manner to support the arguments of whomever is quoting them. However, it is fair to say that Tasmania is holding its own on the economic front. Despite the challenges in the national economy and the inflationary pressures hitting family and business budgets, Tasmania has proven to be fairly resilient. Tasmania has enjoyed a record run regarding the unemployment rate; for nearly three years now, it has been 4.2 per cent or less.

Since the pandemic, our export sector has continued to prosper, thanks in part to the government's support of trade missions. The annual value of merchandise exports has been consistently between \$4.3 billion and \$4.7 billion since reopening the borders in 2021.

With a strong jobs market, retail sector and export trades, it is no wonder that over the past six years, Tasmania has been the strongest-performing state economy in the country. The recent national account data from the ABS shows that Tasmania's domestic economic activity in the four quarters to June was at an all-time high. The government does not take that for granted. The sluggish growth observed nationally is undoubtedly cause for concern, and Treasury's budget forecasts of the economy are necessarily cautious, but they remain positive.

This is a budget that unashamedly addresses the very real cost-of-living pressures facing many Tasmanians as they go about their daily lives. Market research shows us quite clearly that cost of living is the priority issue for Australians at the moment. The market research company IPSOS puts out an ongoing quantitative survey of Australians about the issues facing the nation, Australian states and territories, and Australian local areas. Their latest survey, which was done in August 2024, found that cost of living remains the number one concern for Australians, with 66 per cent of people selecting that. Housing is second at 43 per cent, while

the economy rose to third place at 31 per cent, which was pushing health care to the fourth spot.

Making life more affordable for ordinary Tasmanians is a priority for the government and that is reflected in this Budget. As the Premier has said, Tasmanians are feeling the pinch after 13 interest rate rises and national inflationary pressures. In this Budget, record cost-of-living relief of more than \$550 million is being provided to support Tasmanians through the everyday challenge of affordability.

The government has taken action to help reduce the burden of these challenges through measures such as the Supercharged Renewable Energy Dividend, already saving every Tasmanian household \$250, and with small businesses receiving a \$300 credit. No doubt the Minister for Energy will have more to say on that particular initiative.

The government's commitment to half-price public transport is also noteworthy. Since 1 June, Tasmanian budgets have been benefiting from half-price bus and ferry fares, meaning people get twice as many rides for their money. Students and children now pay only \$1 per trip, helping put money back into the family budget. The government is further supporting families by expanding the successful school lunch program, which delivers healthy and nutritious lunches to students across 60 government schools over the next two years, saving families up to \$950 a year.

We know stamp duty can be a barrier for young homeowners trying to enter the market, which is why the government has stamped it out for first home buyers who purchase an existing home valued up to \$750,000.

Other cost-of-living measures delivered through the 2024-25 Budget include, but are not limited to:

- over 100 different types of concessions, including energy bill relief and concessions, council rate relief for pensioners and water and sewerage concessions;
- the expansion of the Private Rental Incentive;
- the expansion of Ticket to Play;
- the delivery of the new Ticket to WellBeing program;
- the delivery of our Veteran Wellbeing Voucher Program;
- loans of up to \$2000 as part of the No Interest Loan Scheme program;
- raising the land tax tax-free threshold from \$99,999 to \$124,999;
- the new Apartment Incentive Rebate scheme;
- the extension of the Energy Saver Subsidy;
- supporting small businesses to undertake an efficiency dividend audit, which I will come back to in my contribution;
- expanding access to everyday medications available over the counter and extending prescription supply, which is reducing trips to the GP;
- reforming the Patient Travel Assistance Scheme; and
- extending the partnership with the Royal Flying Doctor Service to provide new oral health services to concession card holders and children on the east coast of Tasmania, which is covering St Helens to Nubeena.

These are all tangible measures to reduce the cost of living and increase affordability, and as such are to be welcomed.

This is a budget that also unashamedly recognises the importance, from a strategic perspective, of prioritising infrastructure spending to unlock the short- and long-term benefits it ensures for job creation, economic growth and productivity.

The Budget builds on gains the Tasmanian government has made over the past 10 years, which have delivered intergenerational infrastructure and provided the modern assets that will underpin our economic activity, confidence and growth into the future.

The Budget continues this record investment with an additional \$5.1 billion to be invested into job-creation projects over the next four years. That \$5.1 billion infrastructure investment includes:

- \$1.9 billion of funding for new and upgraded roads and bridges;
- \$646.6 million into hospitals and other health infrastructure;
- \$359.2 million into schools and skills and training facilities; and
- \$287.3 million into keeping Tasmanians safe with investments into new courts, correctional facilities and assets to support Tasmania Police.

They are big numbers. Tasmanian state-owned businesses will also contribute significant funding to deliver major projects totalling \$1.2 billion over the next four years to support the growth of Tasmania's economy. These projects include:

- \$178 million in rail upgrades;
- \$264.2 million into new irrigation schemes; and
- \$42.2 million to commence Hydro Tasmania's redevelopment of the iconic Tarraleah Power Station.

Ongoing investment in public infrastructure assets ensures we can grow our economy and support businesses and industry to invest, expand and employ more Tasmanians. Speaking of employment, I do not think anyone in this Chamber would underestimate the value of small businesses when it comes to employment generation. The bottom line is that small business is absolutely crucial to our economy and to our communities, and the government is committed to providing Tasmanian small businesses with the unwavering support they need to thrive.

The Budget continues to promote a business-friendly investment environment, with the government confirming no new or increased taxes. Understanding where and when businesses use energy is crucial to finding the best way to save money, and so the Budget allocates \$1.8 million over four years for small businesses to access energy audits, which can help them identify savings in energy consumption. The new Energy Efficiency Audit Grants Program will provide grants of up to \$1000 for a small business towards conducting an energy efficiency audit.

The outcomes of audits will help provide recommendations to the business to then pursue, either through their retailer or by making new investments through the Energy Saver Loan Scheme. The scheme provides interest-free loans for energy efficiency improvements for up to \$10,000.

Small business electricity bills in Tasmania have been the lowest in the country, but energy costs remain a significant burden. Anything the government can do to ease or reduce those costs for small businesses is to be welcomed. Other small business related initiatives referred to in the Budget include the red tape reduction measures, such as implementing single form tendering for all tenders under \$250,000, which will save small businesses time and money. There is \$1 million for businesses to access grants of up to \$10,000 for small capital purchases.

We know that cash flow is crucial for small businesses, and this extra funding will no doubt help them to grow through the purchase of computers, electronic payment terminals and new technology.

As recently noted by Robert Mallett, executive director of the Tasmanian Small Business Council (TSBC), in welcoming federal reforms supporting cash flow for small businesses dealing with big businesses:

Every businessperson knows that the first rule is to sell something, the second, is to get paid for it on time. Cashflow, or a poorly managed one, can be the death knell of what can be an otherwise very successful business.

There will be \$400,000 over the next two years for grants of up to \$5000 to vibrant, multicultural small businesses to support building capability and helping with new skills.

Regional chambers of commerce, critical across Tasmania, will receive \$400,000 over the next four years to enable members to consult about delivering the Small Business Growth Strategy and developing the next iteration of that strategy. Grants will support projects like building a website, developing strategic marketing plans and providing advice, coaching or training. The Tasmanian Small Business Council will continue to receive \$65,000 annually from the government to enable it to provide a range of fundamental services to Tasmanian businesses.

All these measures are about helping small businesses do business. As I have said earlier, the importance of small business to our economy and our communities cannot be underestimated.

I want to briefly turn my attention to another area of understandable concern to many people, namely the area of health. As we all know, health and education are always towards the top of the list of things that matter most to Tasmanians. Inevitably, they account for the biggest areas of commitment in terms of funding allocations in state budgets.

Over the next four years, the government will invest \$12.9 billion into building a better health system and \$9.4 billion into improving our education system. Together, the investment in health and education accounts for over 58 per cent of all government spending.

My colleague, the Deputy Leader and Minister for Education, will no doubt provide some insightful comments relating to education, so I will make a few short observations regarding health. The key to a functioning and effective health system is its personnel. It is the people providing the service at the coalface that are crucial in defining whether a health system is healthy or not.

The Budget will deliver more GPs, which we know are crucially needed. There is an investment of \$17.5 million over four years to deliver the GP Now Rapid Response Unit, which is a team of 10 GPs who can be deployed into local communities when and where they are needed in the event of a sudden GP clinic closure.

The Budget also funds the recruitment of 40 new doctors specifically for rural and regional communities by investing \$3.4 million over four years under the GP Scholarship Program, which provides relocation grants of \$100,000. To support the ongoing rollout of new ambulance stations across the state, the government is progressing its plan to employ 78 new full-time paramedics, including 27 community paramedics, with \$39.8 million allocated over the next four years.

These measures, backed by record investment and key infrastructure works, mean Tasmania is nationally and internationally competitive in its efforts to attract and retain healthcare staff. I was particularly pleased to see an announcement from the Health minister recently that the Burnie Ambulance Station at Bridport Road is expected to be finished by the end of this month.

There have been significant changes in Tasmania's demographic profile, including the substantial increase in the number of people aged 65 and over projected by 2050, an increasing change in the chronic disease burden and an increase in the number of patients requiring transport to hospital, particularly those over 65 years old and living in the north-west of Tasmania. These changes have necessitated a re-examination of services such as ambulances.

I understand the Burnie Station project was delayed at the start due to geotechnical issues, resulting in the foundations needing to be redesigned. Other delays were the result of inclement weather. Construction is expected to be completed this month. It will be followed by the usual process of operational or commissioning. That news is welcomed.

Before concluding, I will make a few very brief observations and comments regarding one or two matters of particular interest to me as the member of Montgomery.

More than 100 grassroots communities and sporting clubs are set to benefit from new or improved facilities and infrastructure as part of the Budget, including, and I am pleased to note, funding allocation for the new roof and solar panels for the Forth Football Club, which has been leaking for many years, as well as funding for an electronic scoreboard at the Turners Beach Football Club. There is also the North West Football Association, which has eight fields across the north-west coast, behind-the-scenes cameras, just to make it easier to make people more on their toes so they are not abusing umpires and doing things behind the scenes. Sporting clubs such as these are the cornerstones of their community and they play an enormous role in keeping Tasmanians of all ages fit, healthy and connected to their local communities.

We are also supporting victim/survivors with a new Arch Centre in Burnie, upgrades to the Burnie and Havenview primary schools as part of the School Building Blitz program, supporting students with a disability by investing in a new purpose-built North West Support School in Devonport and delivering significant upgrades to the North West Support School's Burnie Campus.

We are also delivering the first stage of the North West Hospitals Masterplan upgrade at the North West Regional Hospital, including an expanded emergency department, a new

ambulance drop-off and a new medical inpatient building. We are going to improve the acute care facility at the North West Regional Hospital and continue the transition of the North West Maternity Hospital from the North West Private Hospital to the Tasmanian Health Service.

There will also be a continuation of the road upgrades between Devonport and Cradle Mountain. Cradle Mountain is an icon on the north-west coast, so being able to get there is a priority. We are also going to progress the upgrades of the Dial Park and the Dial Regional Sports Precinct in Penguin, a magnificent field. We are going to deliver a state-of-the-art renewable energy training hub on the north-west coast in partnership with industry.

As I said at the onset of my comments on the 2024-25 State Budget, it is more about taking action right now on the things that matter to Tasmanians and making lives more affordable for them. It is about getting the balance right to keep the state's economy strong, creating more jobs and making Tasmania the best place to live, work and to raise a family. This budget delivers record investment in cost-of-living relief and supports Tasmania's most vulnerable people, while at the same time helping to develop stronger communities. I note the Budget.

[11.39 a.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President, let us cut to the chase. This budget is a catastrophe. Where do I start? Everywhere I look there is bad news. The Treasurer's own speech lacked any vigour and rather sought to blame others and tell us all to stop whingeing.

My speech today is likely to be seen by the Treasurer as a huge whinge; if that is the case, I am okay with that and I will whinge away. The Treasurer may have been better to stop whingeing himself and take some responsibility.

There is no plan to stop debt servicing costs eating up more and more of revenue each year. This leaves less and less each year to provide services. In the first Ferguson budget, the so-called surplus was going to be delivered in the first year of the forward Estimates. In the next budget, last year's effort, the surplus was not going to occur until the last year of the forward Estimates. That pushed back the surplus by three years last year.

In this year's Budget, the surplus does not make it to the forward Estimates; instead, we are promised a surplus by 2029-30 - another three-year deferral. The search for a surplus is like trying to find the end of a rainbow: it keeps moving. In any event, I do not know why the Treasurer goes on about the sanctity of an operating surplus when it comprises only a part of what the general government does.

There is the crucial matter of infrastructure spending, which is not captured in an operating surplus figure, and there are all the contributions to the increasing number of government businesses, or the PNFCs, the public non-financial corporations, which are not included in the operating surplus figure either. So, what is the point of talking about a possible return to an operating surplus, a sensible return to surplus, as the Premier put it, when there is so much other spending that will ensure that we will continue to spend far more than we received way beyond 2030?

Let us look at the budget year 2024-25 for a minute. The budgeted operating deficit is \$793 million. Adjust this figure to include actual outlays on infrastructure and the figure known as the fiscal balance - that is a negative \$1.3 billion. I will repeat that because there are a lot of

big numbers I am going to use and I just want to make it clear what we are talking about. If we adjust the budgeted operating deficit to include actual outlays on infrastructure, then the figure known as the fiscal balance is negative \$1.3 billion. Further adjustments, which, to give an even more accurate picture, include all those other outlays - mainly all the equity contributions into government businesses. The result of that is we will spend \$1.9 billion more than we receive in 2024-25.

The net debt of the general government will increase by \$1.9 billion this year. Again, I might repeat that; these are big numbers. We will spend \$1.9 billion more than we receive in 2024-25. That is all in the budget papers, I am not making it up. The net debt of the general government will increase by that amount this year, which means we will spend that much more than what we bring in.

Does anyone else see a problem here? In the last year of the forward Estimates, the operating deficit was projected to be \$63 million, but the overall spending will still exceed revenue by \$613 million - the result of actual infrastructure spending and contributions in the government businesses and for paying other accrued liabilities, including the unfunded superannuation.

The Treasurer has indicated during his post-budget media appearances that the pathway is there for all to see. I cannot see it, nor can Saul Eslake. A balanced budget in 2028-29 and a surplus in 2030 'will cap out the borrowings' - I am using inverted commas because these are the words that the Treasurer used - 'and normalise the level of debt'. Debt will still be increasing and is that what 'normalising' means? That it becomes normal to have an increasing debt?

How can we go from a situation in 2027-28 where we will spend \$613 million more than we receive, necessitating more debt, to a situation two years later where debt is stabilised? Why is the Treasurer making such ridiculous claims? There is no basis whatsoever to do so. It appears he does not even understand his own budget papers.

Many in the media are parroting the baseless claim that there will be a surplus in 2030. It is absolute nonsense. Debt will continue to increase because of infrastructure spending, because of contributions into government businesses and because we will have to keep paying accumulated liabilities.

Mr President and any other members who might have Budget Paper No. 1 with them here: if you have time, you can check the Policy and Parameter Statement in the budget papers. It is quite an instructive read. It shows what amounts have changed in this year's Budget compared to last year's budget.

The Macquarie Point outlays were in last year's budget, along with other proposed infrastructure spending. But in this year's Budget, the Macquarie Point outlays have been removed. In total, \$595 million was removed from the infrastructure budget. Just like magic. That certainly made a difference to the fiscal balances in the respective year.

The government's fiscal strategy No. 5 is to achieve break-even fiscal balances, so this helped a little to close the gap. Wait a second, it was just a reclassification. The money has not disappeared; it has just been reclassified. It was introduced as an extra equity contribution to the Macquarie Point Development Corporation. We are still spending the same amount, but it

is now a little harder to find in the budget papers. It helped to lower the fiscal balance, but we are still borrowing as much. The cynic in me may suggest it is just an accounting trick.

Equity contributions into government businesses are the fastest-growing outlays in the budget. A few years ago, we used to see some equity injections into TasRail or Tasmanian Irrigation, but now the contributions are averaging over \$400 million per year, including the Macquarie Point Development Corporation equity transfer, Stadiums Tasmania and Homes Tasmania. It might not impact operating surpluses or fiscal balances, but it still has to be borrowed. It adds to debt.

Any talk about return to surplus that will allow for debt to stabilise is willfully misleading. There is nothing in this budget that suggests that is remotely possible.

To recap on the Treasurer's surplus illusions: the surplus figure is a narrow figure which only covers operations. There is an amount of depreciation included, but as we spend more on infrastructure than that depreciation amount - all of which is one of government's fiscal strategies (strategy No. 8) - the operating figure understates overall spending.

The operating figure is also inflated by the inclusion of capital grants. Budget paper 1 explains:

The receipt of Australian Government funding for capital programs, particularly one-off major projects, has the effect of improving the Net Operating Balance outcome. Given the nature of the Net Operating Balance measure, it reflects the receipt of revenue from the Australian Government for Infrastructure purposes but does not factor in the expenditure of those funds on infrastructure projects.

The fiscal balance figure includes the full effects of infrastructure spending by the general government, but it does not pick up the spending if the spending is via equity contributions into the growing stable of government businesses, nor does the fiscal balance pick up the cash outlays for previously accrued liabilities. The most important of these is the unfunded defined benefit superannuation liability.

For years, the accrued costs of the defined benefit superannuation were far in excess of what was needed to pay pensions and lump sums on an emerging cost basis. The government was not even required to set aside super guarantee amounts, and both sides of politics took full advantage of this special exemption.

After criticising the Labor Party for not setting aside any amounts, the government followed suit when it came to power.

Do you realise that since 2014 the government has saved \$1 billion by failing to set aside any super guarantee levy amounts, currently now 11.5 per cent of salaries. If you do not know that, you are not Robinson Crusoe. Most people do not know that either, and those who should are often afflicted with convenient amnesia.

Now everything has come to a head. The cash amount needed to pay pensions and lump sums on emerging cost basis has started to exceed the accrual cost each year. This is because

defined benefit members are gradually all retiring and most of them will retire in the next 10 years.

This means that neither the operating surplus figure nor the fiscal balance figure reflects the extra cash needed to pay past accrued defined benefit superannuation liabilities. Extra cash required for this means extra borrowings and more cash is needed to pay the interest bill.

It is not just defined benefits superannuation liabilities that need servicing. There are other liabilities, notably the provision of compensation for victims of sexual abuse in state care. Whilst these amounts were included in the preliminary 2023-24 figures, thus leading to a large deficit in the 2023-24 year, they were accrual amounts. They will need to be paid out over the next few years and when they are paid, they will not affect the operating or fiscal balance figures; they will simply reduce the accrued liability over time. It will require cash to pay them out - more borrowings and an increase in debt.

I hope members and anyone else watching today or reading this later fully appreciate the enormity of this.

To reiterate, the operating deficit for 2024-25 is expected to be \$793 million, but after including all of the infrastructure spending by the general government, the fiscal balance becomes \$1.3 billion.

The inclusion of equity contributions into government businesses and the cash needed to reduce previously accrued liabilities, notably the defined benefit super liabilities and compensation for victims of sexual abuse in state care, gives a figure of \$1.9 billion in cash outlays for 2024-25 in excess of the revenue for the year.

I have gone through this, so hopefully when people will go back and look at this, it is all there. It is hard to track in the budget papers, but it is all there. The operating deficit figure does not give the full picture at all. A further \$1.1 billion will have to be borrowed. Even if and when an operating surplus is achieved, there will be many more outlays requiring funds and more borrowing.

When I set out to write this speech I did not intend to give such a lengthy explanation of the budget outcome, but I was a bit taken aback when the Treasurer's media appearance post budget suggested that he did not understand his own figures. I believed it was important to be really clear. The budget papers indicate there is no chance of a surplus in 2030 that allows net debt to normalise, as the Treasurer put it. We simply cannot start trying to fix the problem unless there is an admission that we have a problem.

The Treasurer tried to sell his caring side by suggesting he is not implementing a slash-and-burn austerity approach to rebuilding Tasmania's public finances. If he is not doing that, he is doing a very good imitation of that. I will explain what I meant by that.

Have a look at the Income Statement on page 61 of budget paper 1. Expenses are \$9.7 billion in 2024-25 and \$9.5 billion in 2027-28, they are both billions. That is less. Most remedial maths students will identify that as a fall over three years, in fact.

As we know, an increasing portion of expenses will be devoted to debt servicing. If you exclude the debt servicing costs, the borrowing costs and the normal superannuation interest as

well as the non-cash amount of depreciation, you derive a figure for what is actually spent on delivering services. You have to take those bits out. The figure is taken from these figures in the budget papers. That figure shows a fall of 5.8 per cent over the three years of the forward Estimates.

Then it is worse. Inflation, which incidentally is Jim Chalmers' fault, I understand now. That is something new I learned from the Treasurer in his budget speech. Look over there - not my fault. Apparently that is the case. The inflation is expected to increase by 8.2 per cent over the period. The CPI projections are on page 28 of budget paper 1. If you adjust for inflation, the fall in the amount of spending on delivering services is 13 per cent. There is a 13 per cent fall when you consider all these factors in the expenditure on services over the next three years.

I argue that perhaps this is an austerity budget; maybe not right now. Are the forward Estimates just guesses after all?

I make this really clear: the amount to be spent on government services in 2028-29 is 13 per cent less than what we will spend in this current year, 2024-25. That does sound a bit like austerity to me and that is how the Treasury is proposing to rebuild Tasmania's public finances. Forget all the talk about record spending in nominal terms. In real terms, spending on services over the forward Estimates is projected to fall by 13 per cent. That is the real terms; the numbers are all there. I am not making anything up. It is all in those budget papers. That is the reality, disclosed by the Treasurer's own figures in the budget papers, and that is the reality that Tasmanians need to understand.

It is not much better on the revenue side. We will go to the revenue side rather than expenditure side. Growth in revenue over the forward Estimates is only 5.6 per cent. That is not 5.6 per cent per year; that is 5.6 per cent over the three-year period. However, it is unadjusted for inflation. In real terms it will fall by 2.5 per cent over the forward Estimates. Let us be honest. That is the government's response to Mr Saul Eslake's report. The need to raise more of our own revenue has been addressed by the government showing a budget with reduced revenue in real terms.

If it were not so catastrophic, I would be laughing. I am at a loss as to where to go next. I was optimistic that the year's late report might be a circuit breaker and we can finally start solving our problems - or at least start talking about them. Thus far, everyone appears to accept there actually is a problem. It is a bit hard to unsee what has been provided to us, but it seems no-one is particularly keen to work out a solution. Let us kick the can down the road for a few more years. The gods may save us, but who knows what we might find at the end of the rainbow. Remember, the end of the rainbow keeps moving.

The Treasurer was right about one thing: he said in his budget speech that Saul Eslake's report was in many ways consistent with the government's new fiscal strategy presented in last year's 2023-24 Budget. The only trouble is that the government is yet to reveal how it intends to achieve the strategy. The progress report in the budget papers this year suggests that the 2032-33 targets are even more distant and that when we talk about those targets, they are in the fiscal strategy, which I am coming to.

Tell me, what is the point of a strategy if there is no plan to meet your targets?

The fiscal strategy is underwater, and there are no actions to address it. Rather, what we see is the use of equity injections that have distorted the out-year outcomes. I am not delusional, as the Treasurer appears to be. I know these budget papers do not provide any semblance of a pathway to sustainability.

I will comment further on the so-called fiscal strategy, the one with no plan to meet targets. As noted in the Treasurer's own Budget Paper No. 1, the fiscal strategy provides a 10-year time frame approach to provide a clear and stable assessment of fiscal performance in the short to medium term, and provides improved links to fiscal principles embedded in the *Charter of Budget Responsibility Act 2007*.

For members who have not been here as long as I have, you will note that the fiscal strategy was significantly changed coming out of the COVID period because the previous ones became completely irrelevant. We now have a relatively new set of fiscal strategies, but they have been the same now for two years, and I think this is the third year.

I will specifically focus on two of the provisions in the principles section of the *Charter of Budget Responsibility Act*. They are all equally important and have arguably not been met. One fiscal principle is to prepare for unexpected events by building a robust financial position. I think we have failed on that. Another is to ensure transparency and accountability in delivering, implementing and reporting on fiscal objectives.

According to the document, an important element of the presentation of the fiscal strategy is that it includes commentary on what action the government will be taking over the budget and forward Estimates to seek to achieve the established actions and targets over the long term. We are also reminded that it is important that the actions and targets in this chapter are also considered in the context of the risks disclosure detailed in Chapter 1 of the budget paper.

To me, the requirement under the act for transparency and accountability in developing, implementing and reporting on fiscal objectives is a massive fail. The fiscal strategy is hopelessly reported. It should be transparent with commentary against each measure as to whether it is on track and, if not, there should be a clear statement to indicate why not and what actions are being taken to correct that.

Rather, what we are presented with are broad motherhood statements and a promise of a review of the targets in 2026-27: 'We will just have another look and maybe have to change them again, so that we can have some semblance of meeting our targets'.

It should be easy for the reader to determine if each strategy and related action is on track or not. If it is not, we should know what we are going to do to correct it. It should be there for us, without blaming everybody else.

To review the targets in 2026-27 is almost code for 'We will need to change them to be sure we can succeed against these targets', rather than looking at how we will achieve them and telling the people of Tasmania what our viable plan is. We do not want or need such delusional falsehoods that we are on a path to sustainability.

The motherhood statement of all motherhood statements was on page 48 of budget paper 1. This statement was related to debt management, and it states that future budgets will address strategies to restore fiscal sustainability and actions to curtail the growth in debt and

borrowing costs. That is great. Future budgets will sort that one out, not that it is not anything to be worried about right now. I could not believe it when I read it. It is there in black and white in budget paper 1, page 48. Go and read it for yourself.

Ms Webb - It is the sound of the can being kicked down the road.

Ms FORREST - And a few other sounds as well. This is appalling. I wonder how the Treasurer still has his job. We have to wait for future budgets to have any idea what actions may be taken to restore fiscal sustainability.

Has the Treasurer not read his own Treasury's fiscal sustainability reports? If he had, none of this would be news to him. After being in this position for three years, or thereabouts, you would think that he would have taken some action before it becomes nigh on impossible. God help the next Treasurer.

This is followed up with a fiscal balance on the next page. I have already mentioned this, but I would add that on page 49 of budget paper 1, the measure or target is a balanced fiscal position over a four-year rolling average with a preliminary outcome. The 2024-25 Budget appears to head in the wrong direction, but how would we really know? That is the information provided. There is no indication of whether we are on track, if we are deteriorating or improving - nothing.

I dutifully moved on to the commentary to see if I could find that information, and was provided with the following:

The Fiscal Balance takes into account the accrual impacts of Government revenue and expenditure excluding depreciation, as well as investment in infrastructure. The target (based on a rolling four-year average) reflects an appropriate balance between revenues, expenditure and investment decisions, in the context of the broader economic, social and fiscal conditions that may be impacting Government. It recognises that a short-term deficit may not be an issue for concern while also recognising the importance of the capacity to repay debt. The value reported for each year is the average of that year and the three preceding years (i.e. a four-year average).

That is what it tells me. What is the Treasurer going to do about it, acknowledging that that is what it is to do? What is the reality here?

It then says, under '2024-25 Budget and Forward Estimates Actions and Targets':

The Government is taking action to improve the Fiscal Balance over time, as demonstrated by the fiscal measures included in this Budget, including through constraining the annual increase in general government operating expenses to below the long-term average growth in revenue.

Maybe they were actually telling us they were cutting spending on operating, but not specifically. It goes on:

Improvement in the Fiscal Balance to achieve the long-term target will require the achievement of the established measures and an ongoing focus on Budget productivity and efficiency improvements.

Another nice motherhood statement. Are we heading for a balanced fiscal position or down a dark tunnel with very little light at the end of it? Is it getting better or worse? If it is worse, why do we not need more clarity on what actions we will be taking beyond the focus on budget productivity and efficiency improvements?

Might I suggest that Treasury consider a traffic light approach to assist the reader? Green: on track. Orange: heading to the tunnel with a corrective action needed. Red: we are in the tunnel. It might be good to let us know how strong the light at the end of the tunnel is, if there is light, and what it will take to get us out of there.

That would be much more helpful to the reader. It is meaningless without some sort of indication of whether we are on track or not, or if we have any chance of meeting the target.

We head to fiscal strategy No. 6, which is on page 50:

Total General Government Sector Own-Source Revenues as a Percentage of Total Expenditure ...

The Government will continue to maintain a competitive tax environment with an objective for state taxes, fees and charges to be efficient, fair, simple, stable and sustainable, and will continue to ensure appropriate returns from government businesses.

This is not a new addition, and I want to reiterate that our state taxes are not efficient, fair, simple, stable or sustainable. The chart indicates that we are well below the set target and that we might be heading towards the target by 2029. If you read the risk and sensitivity section earlier in Chapter 1 of Budget Paper No. 1, I think this representation may also belong with Alice and the white rabbit.

If it is achieved, it will only be because expenses have fallen, meaning that fewer services are being delivered. I will comment on this in a minute. Rest assured, we are informed the government will foster economic growth and promote business investment and job creation to achieve this measure over time.

Will the Treasurer give any indication of how this efficiency, fairness, simple approach, stability and sustainability will be achieved? I think not. That too must be the future budget. It goes tinkle, tinkle down the road.

Fiscal strategy No. 7: The impact of government business enterprises and state-owned companies on the general government sector financial position is negative due to significant contributions from government. Whilst the average impact over 10 years is positive, there is little detail as to how we are going to see a return to positive returns, especially with some of the major capital works some GBEs and state-owned companies are undertaking.

Think about Hydro; think about TasNetworks; TT-Line; TasPorts; more traffic lights are needed here to give meaningful representation of where we are at on this measure.

I will move on now to discuss the budget efficiency dividends. When I read about the efficiency dividend, which should be called taking money with the right hand and handing it back with the left, because that is essentially what it is. I was a little bit speechless when I read some of the commentary on this. In budget paper 1, pages 6 and 7, it reads:

Rebuilding Fiscal Buffers

... Since the 2023-24 Budget, the Government has worked with individual agencies to identify the most appropriate approach to achieving this Budget adjustment. This has allowed agencies to identify where efficiencies can be implemented to improve productivity while ensuring that frontline services are protected.

The Budget adjustment is an additional \$50 million in each of the three years up to and including 2026-27. The 2023-24 Budget reflected the cumulative impact on the Budget of \$150 million in 2026-27, and a total of \$300 million over the 2023-24 Forward Estimates.

That is out of the budget paper - the so-called budget efficiency dividend, which represents approximately 0.5 per cent of total annual expenditure in 2025. However, it is noted in the budget papers, new funding to the general government sector agencies significantly exceeds the saving task in order to meet the priorities identified above. Hence, it is taking out of this hand and giving it back over there.

Every member should be ready to ask questions next week as to exactly where those savings were found, such that we can understand these areas impacted by the cuts and what the new funding will be applied to specifically. Heads up for the ministers here.

We are further informed that a further budget efficiency dividend of \$150 million has been included in 2027-28. This additional \$150 million is delusional. Whilst noted as an expenditure risk in budget paper 1, in my view, it is there to cook the books and make it look better to the tune of \$150 million, especially in the out-years where we are on this imaginary path to surplus and sustainability.

Allegedly, this allows governments and each agency time to review existing efficiency programs and identify how best to allocate the budget efficiency dividend in future budget development processes well before they need to be implemented.

While I am absolutely certain there are a number of areas where efficiencies can be gained, these are, by and large, not in the active frontline and the active backline supporting the frontline of delivering the services. How much more can we expect to be cut from these service deliverers until it is impossible to hide it from or not impact the frontline?

We are a service deliverer. Most of our employee costs are service deliverers. I think there is an overinflated belief of how productivity improvement is one of the keys to help solve our problems. I might say a few things about productivity. It is one of those constants of life: the call for workers to be more productive. Often it is nothing more than a few code words for a belief that workers should be paid less.

Then we have the shadow treasurer, formerly in this House. As part of his budget response, he talked about the need to lift productivity. I thought, what exactly does he mean as the Treasury spokesperson for the party representing workers?

If you want to talk about productivity, the starting point is the value of what is produced. That is what productivity is. A lot of what is produced in the economy is what the economists call immediate goods and services, which are used to make final goods and services. Anything that is an immediate good gets eliminated when adding up what is produced across the economy; otherwise there would be double counting. Much of what the state government produces are final goods: education and health services are final goods and services, community services are final services, and so on. How is what the state government workers produce valued when calculating what a nation produces? The output of our public education system is primarily what the government spends on public education.

To increase productivity, we either need to spend more or reduce staff. That is the only way you can impact productivity on an end service. We pay more staff and productivity rises; that is the reality for government workers producing final goods such as education, health, police and other public order services and community services. When I hear calls for government workers to raise productivity, my first thought is: fine, but my question that follows is, how are you going to measure increased production if the only way to value output is by the money spent by the government on delivering the service?

Cutting workers might save money, but that in turn means output falls because the government spending has fallen. Less production with fewer workers does not mean productivity has improved. The productivity argument is a nonsensical argument, used often as a stick to beat workers. It is unlikely to increase production per worker because the way production and, therefore, productivity is measured is by the amount the government spends when these workers produce final goods or services. My concern is that we use the productivity argument as a bargaining chip when we are trying to solve our sustainability problems, but it is largely a red herring. To implicitly suggest professional service deliverers - nurses, police, teachers - are similar to assembly line workers who produce a measurable product is quite silly.

Back to the actual Budget. The budget paper goes on to say that the 2024-25 Budget supports the government's aim - I would call it a pointless delusion - to return the net operating to surplus in 2029-30, as I have already discussed. We are informed it will be important that budget risks are carefully managed and the budget efficiency dividend requirements are met to ensure that the government is able to continue to meet emerging service demands, maintain appropriate investment for the future of Tasmania and respond to any negative impacts on the revenue that may emerge.

Who does the Treasurer think he is kidding here? We already know about so many of these emerging risks and to say that they are not included is a fanciful comment. Many of these things that are not included are necessary in the risks and sensitivities section of Chapter 1 in budget paper 1. Some of these things include the now somewhat urgent works needed at Berths 1 and 2 in Devonport, if a new *Spirit of Tasmania* should be able to avoid being anchored off somewhere in Bass Strait for an extended period of time - or up the River Derwent somewhere, or some other river out of way or hidden. We have the Macquarie Point Stadium, we have the end of the Mersey money and in 2026-27, there is a mere \$28.2 million left in that little bucket and it ends. We knew this.

Those are not hidden; they are there in the budget papers. We also know the cost-of-living pressures are creating challenges in hospitality and tourism. There is less money to spend on discretionary spending and whilst the interest rates remain where they are, or even worse if they were to go up, the impact on GST receipts could well mean our reliance on this untied funding could expose us even further. This risk, whilst identified in the Budget Risks and Sensitivities section, is not quantified. And then, we have the risk of the unfunded commitments referred to in budget paper 1, page 21:

Commitments made subsequent to the finalisation of the 2024-25 Budget estimates have not been included in the 2024-25 Budget Papers. These will be reflected in the 2024-25 Revised Estimates Report.

This is essential reading for all. I ask, have we already seen additional funding commitments made that are going to make this picture even worse? I will ask a bit more about that next week also.

So, whilst it is usually unexpected to have risks to revenue and expenditure listed in the Budget Risks and Sensitivities section, there are some massively expensive risks there that are quite likely to occur. They are risks, but the chances of some of those actually happening are almost predictable.

Also, backing up some of my previous comments: it is clear some of the assumptions in the Budget are clearly 'heroic'. I say heroic in inverted commas in that regard because they are almost inconceivable. The reality for a couple of examples is that wages growth is too low without a major reduction in staffing - and when a large number of our staff are frontline service deliverers who are already under the pump and feeling unsupported.

If you look at the wages growth of that period - and this goes to the reduction in money spent for service delivery - it does not compute unless we are getting rid of a whole heap of staff or paying them less. The further \$150 million efficiency dividend also seems fanciful.

As I have mentioned previously, I detect an underlying theme in this year's Budget: nothing here is the government's fault and it is always someone else's. The federal government has been listed as a reason for some of our problems, from its inability to slay the inflation dragon and blame other people, to its reluctance to provide funds for every project on its wish list.

With regard to the latter, a new table was included in the budget papers on page 144, setting out the \$ 1.64 billion in projects ready to go if only the federal government will hand over \$ 1.134 billion in funds. Not our problem - we cannot make them happen; the feds have to stump up some more.

The government continues to perpetuate a misunderstanding of how the Commonwealth Grants Commission works. I will be asking the Treasurer, and I am sure people may be listening and note this down, to update the table to disclose: which of those grants on the table on page 144, budget paper 1 will affect our GST share in the future? It is all well and good to get these other additional big licks of money. But if they are not quarantined, then we just pay them back. Let us be honest about that.

For instance, will not a \$60 million grant for the Northern Heart Centre be clawed back? Apart from our per capita share, which is roughly \$2 million to \$3 million or so, trying to hoodwink Tasmanians continues to almost be a pathological obsession for this government. Take, for example, this comment from the Treasurer's speech:

Tasmania's net debt remains low compared to other states and territories, being the lowest on a nominal basis and the third lowest as a percentage of gross state product ...

It is not an outright lie, but a deliberately misleading statement, I would suggest. We know that most people will not read the budget papers in full; if they did, they would learn that whilst net debt may be low, net debt plus unfunded superannuation liabilities is the highest among states. For those of you who have Mr Eslake's information here, it is clearly outlined in a table for you all to see. That is the reality. It is misleading by omission. Let us look at the true picture. That liability is there; it is real. Yes, it is over many years, but we still have to find money to pay for the emerging costs as they fall due, and we have to borrow to do so.

Also for Treasury to note, I will be seeking a chart updating chart 7.3 in budget paper 1 showing how our debt and unfunded superannuation as a percentage of GSP will move over the forward Estimates and how this compares to other states. Let us be honest about it. Hopefully someone in Treasury can pass that on so they will have that ready to provide to me next week.

It is time to stop the pretence that all is okay. The unfunded superannuation liabilities are de facto debt amounts for no other reason than both parties chose not to fund any defined benefit superannuation, not even the super guarantee portion, choosing instead to spend the cash rather than to borrow whilst knowing it was kicking the can down the road and the borrowing would eventually be needed. Both parties have done it - not just one; both.

As Mr Eslake has pointed out, the real determinant of our truly sustainable position is to look at the overall public non-financial (PNF) sector. This includes government businesses, as well as the general government. I go on about this every year, but you cannot look at the full picture without looking at all our government businesses other than the financial ones, which is MAIB and TASCORP.

What the government does is inextricably linked with government businesses. We need to look at the complete picture if we face the future with our eyes wide open. To that end, I will also be asking the Treasurer to provide a chart of net debt and defined benefit superannuation liabilities as a percentage of GST for all states across the forward Estimates. We need to understand exactly where we are instead of the Treasurer's cherry-picking stats. The Leader herself did mention potentially cherry-picking stats to downplay the seriousness of our dilemma.

As I said earlier, this decline in the budget and the reality we are facing is no surprise. If anyone read either of the last two fiscal sustainability reports prepared by Treasury, not the Treasurer, in 2021 and 2016, you would be well aware of this. The Public Accounts Committee looked at and reported on those as well, so they were not hidden away. The looming challenge was laid out clearly. Action to address the challenges of fiscal sustainability for the state needed to be taken earlier to avoid the need for more drastic action since 2016. Sadly, those warnings went unheeded and have been exacerbated by two early and very expensive state elections.

No longer can taking one or two actions do the job. We need to pull many levers and we need to agree on a way forward. We need to consider, as part of this, the federal-state financial relations and the related agreements. The Treasurer can expect some questions about that next week as well. The solution to many of our problems will require federal-state agreements and I am concerned, along with the Treasurer, about the federal government's desire to shift costs to the state. I am concerned about that and I share his concern.

I recently wrote about this in an opinion piece, in part responding to Saul Eslake's report when that came out. The reality is that if we are to have any credibility on the national stage to earn our place at the table, people have to take us seriously. To do that, we need to start sorting out some of our own problems first, which means acknowledging we have a problem. That is something this Budget has palpably failed to do. Saul Eslake called it a triumph of politics over economics. I think he was being kind. I regard it as a triumph for wilful ignorance.

I will now move on to some more specific areas of the Budget. The first thing I would like to talk about is the Gender Budget Statement. I commend the government on the improved Gender Budget Statement. It is good to see much more detail in this as opposed to a list of initiatives that might benefit women, which is what it has been in the past. I accept it was a new initiative only a couple of years ago, and the government has come a long way with this. I acknowledge that and thank them for that.

I also note that it is very encouraging that the use of gender impact assessment framework has been applied. In this case, it has been applied to seven budget initiatives. It is great. This is a really important step and an approach that should be taken across all policy positions. I am happy to accept it is a small step, but it is a positive move. I know that the former minister for women, the member for Rosevears, was very passionate about this when she held the portfolio and helped kick this off.

The statement stated Tasmania's gender pay gap is 5 per cent, an improvement since the 8.3 per cent gap in 2021 and significantly below the national average. However, the government has chosen not to use the Workplace Gender Equality Agency assessment, with which, if they had used that, our gender pay gap would be 21.7 per cent. It is still an improvement on the previous assessment, but I am concerned that they are using the ABS figures rather than the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's. I say that because that agency is an Australian Government statutory agency created by the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*. It should be used as the authority on this, and it should be used consistently across all government department agencies, government businesses and state-owned companies. I would urge the government, if you want to report that, focus on the Workplace Gender Equality Agency model because that is the gold standard.

Despite this improvement, however, the gendered nature of industries, childcare costs and family violence continue to limit women's economic security. Initiatives like half-price fares and out-of-school-hours care aim to reduce financial strain but lack robust solutions for systemic inequality in workforce participation and career progression. I will not comment on all the measures; however, I would like to draw members' attention to some.

If you look at the snapshot on pages 8 and 9 of the statement, it is clear inequality and inequity persist. Some might say it is almost contradictory with 34.5 per cent of women and 24 per cent of men attaining bachelor degrees or above; the pay gap persists and the proportion of women in part-time work and underemployed is still significantly higher than for men.

Interestingly, budget paper 1 informs us on pages 36 and 37 that while both male and female employment have experienced growth, most of the growth since August 2021 has been in female employment. They do not really quite line up except it does confirm, I guess, that women, when they are employed, are often underemployed, in part-time employment, possibly less secure employment, even though more women than men have bachelor degrees or above. Clearly, we need to keep working at this.

While this is identified, there is no mention of data contained in the Gender Budget Statement. The Treasurer had a message in this. If he is going to make a contribution to the statement, he should focus on some of this. Of course, there are reasons for these discrepancies, and workforce interruption through the childbearing years for women is part of that. This can be addressed through greater access to affordable child care - which is not necessarily the state government's responsibility; it is a federal government responsibility, but that is a really important part. It can also be addressed by improved parental leave entitlements, which are also a responsibility of the federal government.

Some workplaces and institutions do this better than others, with generous maternity and paternity leave provisions and access to child care. My youngest daughter is an example of having a proactive employer in this, at Latrobe University, where she was recently awarded significant promotion whilst on maternity leave. She also had quite generous maternity leave provisions; paternity leave provisions were also provided for her husband and her leave was also supported by the Victorian government. She was also provided with a transition to return to part-time work on her path to full time. There are models of this around that help bridge that gap. I was very impressed that she was given the opportunity not only to apply but get a significant promotion whilst on maternity leave when she took 12 months off with her last baby. It can and should be done, especially in our government-funded organisations and departments.

The statement notes that labour force participation is improving. Whilst it is improving, it is worse than the national measure.

When we consider leadership and participation - one of the measures in the statement - despite improvement in women's representation in politics and leadership, subtle workplace biases persist, such as that referred to with regard to the analysis of the Regional Tourism Loan Scheme. This is the benefit of having a gender framework to run across these policies. It helps to identify these issues - a big tick for that.

In terms of economic security, the statement notes it is likely that for capital investment projects supported through the scheme, economic benefit will initially be directed towards male-dominated industries as part of construction work. In applying to the scheme, applicants must demonstrate that personnel within the business have the key skills required and that the proposal will create jobs.

As such, given women make up at least half of the tourism workforce, it is possible that the scheme will support women's employment, particularly in regional areas. Running a gender lens across those decisions, therefore, helps to identify these issues and matters.

Further, under Leadership and Participation it states that research suggests that an employee's gender can be a significant factor in wages received in the tourism sector. Without positive discrimination towards female-owned or female-led tourism businesses as part of the

eligibility criteria in this scheme, it is difficult to know what impact it will have on women's leadership in the tourism sector. However, it can be assumed that a portion of loans will be directed towards businesses that are either female-owned or have women in key leadership positions.

It is common across the tourism sector internationally for men to dominate conferences and networking events. Australian tourism conferences tend to include a greater proportion of female keynote speakers than elsewhere, and it is hoped that women supported by this scheme will receive positive recognition for their efforts. That would not have been identified without the framework being put across it, which is a positive tick for the government.

Is the Minister for Energy and Renewables noting down the ticks I am giving?

Under Safety in the gender impact statement, the scheme is not expected to have major impacts on women's safety. Increasing opportunities for employment in regional areas may contribute to increased economic security for women, which could enable more autonomy and decision-making when in unsafe domestic relationships. This is dependent on the security of the jobs created. I found the language of this one unsettling, especially the reference to enabling more autonomy and decision-making when in unsafe domestic relationships. Whilst economic security is vital in this situation, the reality is that some abusive relationships are financially abusive, and even if a woman is earning her own money, it is not always easy for her to access or to safely keep her money. That said, I appreciate the approach being taken to apply a gender lens to these initiatives.

I am now going to move on to other aspects of safety. I warn members that I am going to talk about some of the safety issues facing women, particularly in terms of their physical safety, and it is not good news.

Despite reforms targeting family violence, data indicates that rates are worsening. The Rapid Rehousing boost and Change for Children initiatives offer critical support to victims, but long-term reductions in violence require more comprehensive prevention strategies. Family violence is a national crisis that requires a critical response, and whilst we are seeing greater investments, we are not seeing the positive change we need. Furthermore, in terms of general safety, we are not making the positive change needed.

On page 36 of the statement, there is a quote stating:

I honestly don't know a time I feel completely safe as a woman.

I know this to be the lived reality for so many women. We know we have to give more thought to the route we will walk to and from work or in the community, especially after dark. We think about what we are wearing. We think about how we might defend ourselves. We think about locking the doors of our car when we are driving and stopped at a traffic light. We know that society broadly expects us to be responsible for our physical safety. We also know how important financial security is, and we know many of us do not experience this. We know more of us - our daughters, mothers, grandmothers, sisters and female friends - are more at risk of experiencing family violence in all its forms. We know the most dangerous time to leave an abusive relationship is between when we or our loved one makes the decision to leave and when we or they actually leave.

We worry about this because we know it is the most likely time for a woman to be killed by a current or former intimate partner. We know that sometimes the first act of physical violence against a woman in an abusive relationship is murder. We know that young women and young girls are overwhelmingly represented in sexual assault statistics - assaults that have lifelong and life-impacting outcomes. We know it is not our fault, but we also know society tells us it is our fault.

I could go on, but it is exhausting and frustrating in equal measure. I acknowledge the very important initiative that is being rolled out in response to some of these challenges: the multidisciplinary centres, or Arch centres. I appreciate the commitment to build one in Burnie. I know that is going to happen, and I note the Budget commitments related to that. These are important after-the-event measures. We must focus on evidence-based prevention. I appreciate some of this reality is clearly outlined in the Gender Budget Statement. We cannot unsee this. We must do much better.

I also acknowledge the sad over-representation of men in suicide statistics. As a warning, I am going to make some comments now regarding suicide and suicidal ideation. As noted on page 51 of the statement, while males are much more likely to die by suicide than females, the data shows that females are more likely to attempt suicide. Females are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, which is one of the main factors leading to suicide. Men are more likely to die as a result of their attempt. That is a global phenomenon, and is also reflected in the national statistics.

In Tasmania, suicide is the main cause of death for people aged between 25 and 44. This is comparable with Australia nationally, where suicide is the main cause of death among people aged 15 to 49. In Australia, the data shows that trans and non-binary people are more likely to experience suicidal thoughts and attempt suicide when compared to the general population. We know these really sad statistics.

This statement also reflects the work undertaken by the Joint Committee on Gender and Equality into the high gendered rates of suicidal ideation and suicide in Tasmania. Their report included four recommendations. One recommendation was for the government to take a whole-of-government approach to address the social and economic drivers of suicidal ideation and suicide as a critical focus for effective prevention, and actively build and sustain community networks. Understanding the factors that drive suicide and suicidal ideation is crucial to address this challenge. I know there is work being done in suicide prevention strategies. As we know, suicide has a truly devastating effect on the family and friends of those reflected in these tragic statistics. They are real people experiencing real distress.

I note the response in this statement to this area in commentary on Men's Sheds. These are a fantastic and important response to men's mental health and wellbeing, but they are not enough to address the bigger problems. I appreciate there are other initiatives, including the Budget itself. We must act in an evidence-informed manner to address this issue. I could say more on this, but at this stage I wish to acknowledge the work that has been done, and look forward to responses to these inequities and areas of inequality over coming times. This document has come a long way since it was first introduced, and I give credit for that.

I also now want to move on to one of my favourite topics - Montello Primary School. The uplift of \$2.5 million to a total of \$9.6 million is very welcome. I thank the Minister for Education. She is not in the Chamber; maybe she is listening. I credit her on the work with the

Public Works Committee too that noted that the funding was inadequate to deliver what was actually needed at Montello Primary School.

The reality is, this redevelopment was always significantly underfunded. It was never going to be able to deliver what was needed, in any shape, at Montello School. It was always underfunded and always inadequate, hence the need to keep banging on about it. Whilst I am very grateful for the efforts of the minister, this is not an equitable outcome for my community and Montello Primary School. I say that because, yes, it will allow those really dangerous windows to be removed - the ones that can chop a child's fingers off - but there are other areas that still will not be able to be delivered with this funding available.

I note another primary school, also in need of redevelopment, also in my electorate, a little bit further to the west, is getting funding upfront of \$14 million. So, we have \$9.6 million at Montello Primary School after fighting for years and we have \$14 million - very welcome funding - for Burnie Primary School. The Leader mentioned this school in her contribution as well. I find it hard, as my community of Montello Primary School does, to understand how and why \$4.4 million more is being provided to redevelop a school on a relatively flat site that is a newer building - not new, but newer than Montello Primary School is - and to attract this level of funding.

As I have said many times, Montello Primary School is in a very low socioeconomic area, a quite disempowered community, with a parent body that does its best to fight for what they know they deserve. Sadly, this has left this community feeling unsupported and unheard. Whilst I fully support the funding for Burnie Primary School because it is absolutely needed there - they have outgrown so many of the buildings they have - I know my community of Montello feel disrespected and unheard. As I have said for years, when you have a disempowered school community, this adds to that sense of frustration and disrespect. We have many fantastic advocates and families willing to speak up and fight for this school, but it is much harder.

Burnie Primary School also services some low socioeconomic areas, that is true, but also the catchment that they take in includes some quite advantaged families, particularly by way of comparison; whereas Montello is sort of in the heart of it and its catchment pretty much completely takes in those more disadvantaged communities. I welcome the redevelopment for Burnie Primary School and I know they will be very grateful for that too.

I acknowledge and welcome the extra \$2.5 million to assist with some further work at Montello Primary School that is desperately needed. As I said, it will help replace the very dangerous windows, but it will fall short of delivering the original set of works required to deliver a fully contemporary learning space that these families deserve.

It also makes sense to do a proper job in the first place. To do it all in one go is much more cost-effective and efficient. Coming back to doing more work at a later time to address the things that cannot be funded in this allocation is never economical and it is more disruptive to student learning.

Then, just outside my electorate - and the Leader did not mention this one - is Havenview, another primary school that is to the east. It is outside my electorate, in the Leader's electorate. This school will receive \$11.6 million. I do not fully understand the requirements of Havenview Primary School because it is not in my electorate, so I do not tend to go there. I also

know that too is a very old building, but that school is still getting more than Montello Primary School, with the very old building, the inaccessible building, the unsafe building in many senses, on a really steep slope with all sorts of access and safety issues for children. This school is already getting more than that upfront.

They are both going to be done at similar times, so the cost blowouts, or whatever it is that might be contributing to higher allocations here, do not hold water in my community in Montello.

It seems to me that the community of Montello is the poor cousin here on a very steep and challenging site with a very old school that is unsafe in many ways and inaccessible in many areas, in a low socio-economic area with a broadly disempowered parent body. I am grateful for the increase in funding, but we will be asking in the budget Estimates if there are any other buckets of money listed that could be accessed to assist and do a full and proper job.

Mr President, I wish to close on another very important matter. This matter is important to democracy and that is the adequate funding of the parliament. If we value democracy, accountability and transparency, we do need a properly funded parliament.

Society expects the parliament to pass law, debate and inquire into relevant matters and to hold the government, and thus the executive, to account. The role of the Legislative Council is very important, as this is a house of review. This parliament has been underfunded for years. As we all know, under-resourced bodies, including the parliament, mean less timely scrutiny and sometimes limited scrutiny itself. In terms of timing for budget submissions, I note budget submissions are provided to Treasury in January/February, or that is the latest time, and when this was done for the parliament request for funding this year, I have no doubt it was done entirely in good faith.

We also know an early election was called and that resulted in 10 additional members being elected to the House of Assembly, which also resulted in an extraordinarily large workload to accommodate those members without the anticipated 12-month lead-in. Suddenly, there they were.

Parliamentary committees are crucial to the effective functioning of the parliament. For as long as I have been here, I can recall the sum of \$12,000 for the Legislative Council under line item 1.2 Committee Support Services; that is in budget paper 2 Volume 2. The Legislative Council has a small and very effective committee secretariat. I sincerely thank them for their hard work. They are working hard at the moment, rest assured. I know how hard they are working.

The Council also administers many busy joint parliamentary committees, including the Public Accounts Committee. That is a busy committee at the moment and more members will be aware of that. It has been very active lately. The Subordinate Legislation Committee has a significant administrative workload. We also administer the Commission of Inquiry Committee and the Workplace Culture Oversight Committee. All these committees have a large and complex workload.

Unlike the House of Assembly, the Legislative Council received only a modest amount of additional funding to assist. We also have select committees from time to time, including the UTAS inquiry which is still on foot - that is one such inquiry. Since 2010, when

I successfully moved to establish our Government Administration Committees A and B, these committees have done a power of work without any additional budget, except the occasional request for additional funding, or RAFs, as required.

So, what do we see this year? We see the same amount of funding this year and over the forward Estimates, \$12,000, and if I look back it was \$12,000. However, when we look at the House of Assembly, there is a new allocation for investigatory committee support services funding for 2024-25 of \$131,000 - \$12,000 and \$131,000. They now have two administration committees, as we have had for 14 years, and we have had those for 14 years without any additional funding.

Our committee secretariat is stretched thin and not adequately supported by the government in terms of funding. In terms of this House, we have a very small Chamber team with only one parliamentary administration officer who does a power of work, but he is still only one person. Although there are 10 new members in the House of Assembly and some extra spending done in parliament's expansion, there should be a sense of equity when it comes to the funding of both Houses.

The work of parliament in a bicameral parliament means the work of one House impacts the other. As you know, Mr President, a bicameral parliament operates under principles of exclusive cognisance. That is, we are masters of our own destiny and control our own affairs. We respect the comity between the Houses, that is, the principles of equity and fairness. If the government chooses not to fund the Legislative Council adequately in this area, what does that say about their priorities for scrutiny, transparency and accountability?

The funding challenge for the parliament does not stop there. I want to mention that, over two years ago, the government commissioned Sarah Bolt, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, to review the workplace culture across parliament and the parliamentary and ministerial services. Sadly, this review was similar to reviews undertaken in parliaments around the country with many cultural challenges and legacy issues that need to be addressed. We know that implementing any change recommended in the report is hard; it takes time and resources.

As noted in the Bolt *Motion for Respect* report: change can be confronting and difficult.

The independent reviewer warns against the denial of issues now evidenced to exist. To deny that significant structural and cultural issues need extensive improvements would be to undermine all people who participated in the review in the hope it would contribute to the betterment of the MPS workplace. Further, the independent reviewer implores leaders across the MPS workplace to embrace the need for change as a positive path forward, resulting in a workplace where every employee can thrive. The inconvenience of change must not be an excuse for inaction.

As per recommendation 2 of that report, a joint committee was established and funding made available to resource an independent project manager (IPM) to report to the committee. The IPM was appointed, and the work on the recommendations that the IPM had carriage of to deliver began. The work of the committee was interrupted by an early election. However, even though the committee could not do work over that time, over the first six months of this year an enormous amount of work has been undertaken by our Clerks off the sides of their desks

and at DPAC under the leadership of Kathrine Morgan-Wicks to implement the recommendations relevant to each area.

Whilst the administration of parliament is not a matter that we should involve ourselves in as members, it affects our working lives. Each House and the Legislature-General work hard to support us in the discharge of our parliamentary duties. I know our Clerks and committee secretariat regularly work on weekends or late at night during the week to keep up with the workload as they seek to meet our expectations.

Our very small team, including the Corporate Services Manager, is also responsible for managing 15 electorate offices, as well as the 15 electorate officers, with all the requirements to manage leases and related matters. They are effectively required to do this off the side of their desks. While the new joint senior position has been funded, this position is not one to lead and manage the change that is required under the implementation of the recommendations in the Bolt report.

I am a member of this committee, as you, Mr President, also are, and we know and others would be aware that overseeing the delivery of the recommendations requires the committee to commission an independent review of the ministerial and parliamentary services' organisational and government structure, including an audit of instruments of appointment, employment conditions, recruitment processes and pay structures.

The delivery of this report of the review was delayed as parliament was prorogued. The work was done, but could not be delivered to the committee as required for some time as a result of that early election. Thus, the committee was unable to act until it was re-established in June this year following its last meeting on 18 December 2023. It was not that we were not meeting regularly; it is that we could not meet at all because of the prorogation.

The report has been provided to the committee, and the report has now been provided to the Clerks by the committee to inform next steps. As staff across the parliament would know, the Clerks have invited all staff to a regular town hall meeting that I believe is scheduled for this Friday. At this meeting, I understand the Clerks are planning to share information, as authorised by the committee - the committee has carriage of this - about the independent review of the structure of the Tasmanian parliamentary entities commissioned by the independent project manager reporting to this Joint Sessional Workplace Culture Oversight Committee.

This report is an independently commissioned report of the committee, not the Clerks. As I mentioned, it was to review the ministerial -

The sitting was suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.30 p.m.

QUESTIONS

Spirit of Tasmania - Accessibility on New Vessels

Mr EDMUNDS question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.31 p.m.]

- (1) Regarding the new *Spirit of Tasmania* ships: how many accessible cabins will there be?;
- (2) where will the accessible cabins be located?; and
- (3) what considerations around disability and accessibility have been built into the design of both the new ferries and the supporting port infrastructure?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for his question. I am pleased to see this question come through because I asked exactly the same question for a constituent of mine. The answer was ready last week, as you know.

Ms Forrest - But you needed to get the answer first.

Mrs HISCUTT - Well, it was not going out to the media. It was just for a constituent who was asking.

- (1) The new ships will have eight accessible cabins with a connecting cabin reserved for carers, if required. Each accessible cabin is connected by an internal door. All shower units have height-adjustable seating and non-slip flooring.

In addition to the accessible cabins, there are also two allergy cabins allocated on the new vessels.

A further eight cabins have hearing loop capability with closed caption television located inside them.

- (2) The accessible cabins are located close to the lifts.
- (3) The new vessels have addressed the Disability Standards for Public Transport 2002 in their design. In addition, TT-Line has actively engaged with Disability Voices Tasmania (DVT) and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) regarding the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS). TT-Line has engaged with them early in the development and design process to ensure the needs of disabled persons are appropriately met from both an accommodation and access perspective as advised by DVT, and from a safety and evacuation perspective as required by AMSA under SOLAS.

Design features include the following:

- All decks have lift access.
- Both recliner areas will have dedicated accessible recliner positions and accessible bathrooms.
- All public decks will have ramps in the wide doorways and the reception desk will allow for direct wheelchair access.
- All food outlets on board will have QR codes on tables to view menus. This will also include an operational solution for vision-impaired passengers.
- The Teen Lounge/video gaming area will be wheelchair accessible and usable.
- Two cinemas will be part of the entertainment package, both with accessible access ramps, and dedicated accessible seating allocated with the ability to turn subtitles on and off.
- There is an FM system and audio description for vision-impaired passengers and all signage will incorporate braille.
- Digital signage throughout the vessel is included in the entertainment platform on your mobile device, and signage and subtitle options have been confirmed.

To access the vessel, the company will operate a bus service for foot passengers that will be accessible, and deliver and pick passengers up to and from Deck 7, where there is lift access to all areas of the new vessel.

While the public access building designs are not yet finalised, all buildings will be in accordance with all relevant building and safety regulations, codes and standards including, but not limited to, the National Construction Code (NCC) 2019, the *Building Act 1993*, Building Regulations 2018 and, most relevantly, the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.

Climate Change (State Action) Act 2008 - Advisory Bodies

Ms WEBB question to MINISTER for ENERGY and RENEWABLES, Mr DUIGAN

[2.35 p.m.]

As per the undertaking provided to the Council on 18 October 2022 during debate on amendments to the *Climate Change (State Action) Act 2008*, what review has been undertaken of other jurisdictions' arrangements for advisory bodies, to give effect to an advisory-type body on climate change for Tasmania; and can you please detail the process of any review undertaken, as well as any outcomes?

Ms O'Connor - We had one of them; it was called the Climate Action Council.

Ms WEBB - We discussed it at the time.

ANSWER

In 2022, the previous minister committed to reviewing the climate change governance arrangements for Tasmania. During 2023, the Climate Change Office undertook a review of other jurisdictional arrangements for advisory bodies within a broader piece of work. Due to the election, progress to review governance arrangements has been delayed.

The *Climate Change Act 2008* requires an independent review of the act to be undertaken every four years. As governance is an integral part of the act and how it operates, the governance review has now been incorporated into the independent review of the *Climate Change Act 2008*, which will begin before the end of 2024.

The independent review of the act will be undertaken by an external consultant, as it has been in previous years; the governance review will be informed by models used in other jurisdictions. The terms of reference are currently being developed for the review and will be made available on the ReCFIT website.

Public consultation on the independent review and governance arrangements will be undertaken for at least five weeks, consistent with previous commitments made to the parliament.

In the meantime, the Climate Change Office convenes the Climate Change Reference Group, made up of a broad membership from across community, conservation, academia and industry including: the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI); University of Tasmania; Climate Tasmania; Local Government Association of Tasmania; Tasmanian Minerals, Manufacturing and Energy; RACT; Unions Tasmania; TasFarmers; Australian Medical Association (AMA); Tasmanian Forest Products Association; Premier's Youth Advisory Council.

The Climate Change Reference Group provides an advisory function to me, as minister, and the Climate Change Office. It acts as a valuable sounding board on a range of matters related to climate and the circular economy.

Ms O'Connor - It is a good thing the climate is prepared to wait for us to fix our legislation.

Mrs Hiscutt - Is that your question?

Ms O'Connor - No, an observation that the climate is not prepared to wait for us.

Halls Island Lease - Possible Termination

Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for PARKS and ENVIRONMENT, Mr DUIGAN

[2.38 p.m.]

In the other place today you did not answer a very straightforward question we asked about Halls Island at Lake Malbena. I will put it in really clear, simple language. I trust you have a copy of the Halls Island lease.

Leaseholder Wild Drake Proprietary Limited has shut up shop and is the subject of wind-up proceedings. Your responsibility as minister is to enforce the conditions of the lease, which clearly states that you have the power to terminate the lease in the case of insolvency or if the business ceases to operate. These are clauses 19.1 (g) and (f). Both of these things are true.

When will you inform yourself of the facts and dissolve the lease over Halls Island inside the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for the question. As stated previously in the other place, the proponent has responded to a request by the Australian Government and has submitted additional information as part of EPBC referral. It is a matter for the Australian Government to review any relevant information and provide advice to the proponent directly - and awaiting the decision of the minister, Ms Plibersek.

As regard to legal matters, I am aware the environmental organisations lodged proceedings with the Federal Court of Australia in relation to legal costs to be paid by Wild Drake, and as I said this morning, any recent judgments and proceedings are a matter for the proponent. Given this involves legal matters, I will not be providing a running commentary on that. I am advised by the department that all lease and licence payments to the government are up to date.

Halls Island Lease - Possible Termination

Ms RATTRAY question to MINISTER for EDUCATION, Ms PALMER

[2.42 p.m.]

What criteria were used to assess the 15 school upgrades listed on page 65 of Budget Paper No. 2, Volume 1? I am interested in how they are chosen, and how they win the prize over and above many other schools.

Mr PRESIDENT - I remind members that regarding questions about the Budget, you will have the Estimates process to drill down further.

Ms RATTRAY - Not for every member directly.

Ms Forrest - But you can send questions to the other committee.

Mr PRESIDENT - Yes, but if the minister wishes to answer the question, she may.

Ms PALMER - Yes, Mr President. I thank the member very much for the question. The 15 schools that are to be funded go through quite a careful selection process to be selected as priority one. That is done by the Department for Education, Children and Young People, and it is done on an assessment of a number of different things.

We call it an audit. We are looking at building conditions; we are looking at the school's capacity. We are also looking at data and information that comes in through the census process

to look at how quickly areas might be developing. The department makes those decisions based on a set of criteria through that audit process.

Sustainability Strategy - Time Frame

Ms WEBB question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.44 p.m.]

My question again goes to the progress of the state sustainability strategy. Further to the response provided by the Premier on 10 September, in which specific queries were not fully addressed, can the government specifically detail:

- (1) Will the final Tasmanian Sustainability Strategy be released in 2024, as stated in the published time frame?
- (2) If the final Tasmanian Sustainability Strategy is not expected to be finalised and released by 2024, what is the expected finalisation and release date?
- (3) What is the proposed Sustainability Strategy implementation time frame including expected commencement data?

ANSWER

Mr President, I have the following answers:

- (1) The department is currently working through feedback from a discussion paper released last year, which will then be provided to government for consideration.
- (2) This is yet to be determined.
- (3) The components of positive action that combine to form the Sustainability Strategy are already underway.

For example, the Climate Change Office in ReCFIT is progressing Tasmania's Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2025, including the development of sector-based emissions reduction and resilience plans.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania is developing a new Threatened Species Strategy to provide a contemporary framework to maximise the conservation and recovery of our threatened species and prevent others from becoming threatened.

Halls Island Lease - Possible Termination

Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for PARKS and ENVIROMENT, Mr DUIGAN

[2.46 p.m.]

Minister, as a matter of principle, do you believe an insolvent business should hold a lease, be the owner of a lease over a property inside public lands such as the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area?

ANSWER

As I have said in my previous answers -

Ms O'Connor - As you have evaded.

Mr DUIGAN - No, as I have said in my previous answers, I am not about to predict what will occur. I am not going to get into that space. As I have also said, I will await departmental advice and, at such time as is appropriate, I will act on that advice.

MOTION

Budget Papers and Appropriation Bills (No. 1 and No. 2) 2024 - Noting

Resumed from above (page 30).

[2.47 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - I had hoped to finish before lunch. I want to pick up on the comments I was making regarding the Workplace Culture Oversight Committee in relation to the funding of parliament, the challenges that we see in this House and the inequity between the two Houses. We operate in a bicameral system where comity between the Houses is key, as is the cognisance of both Houses.

I was talking about the report that was commissioned by the Workplace Culture Oversight Committee, pursuant to the recommendation in the *Motion for Respect* report - which was an independently commissioned report of the committee, not the Clerks - to review the organisational structures of the parliamentary workplace, including an audit of instruments of appointment, employment conditions, recruitment processes and pay structures.

In an institution as old and as important as parliament, it is vital that parliament and ministerial services staff walk the walk and accept the need for change, along with the need for contemporary ways of working, with a clear, open, contemporary and effective governance model. As I mentioned previously, change is hard. Change takes time, and it must be adequately resourced. Making any changes where people who may be impacted are involved must be done respectfully and openly with experienced and skilled change management staff. To do this, the parliament, particularly our Clerks, need resources and support. Important and necessary change simply cannot be managed off the side of a person's desk.

The challenges of change have also been articulated in other similar reports related to matters that were outlined in the Bolt report. The May 2019 External Independent Review into

Bullying and Harassment in the New Zealand Parliamentary Workplace by Debbie Francis noted:

While in the following sections I identify a number of things that *could* be actioned right away, sustainable behavioural and cultural change takes time and must be executed on a systematic basis, accompanied by rigorous process review and reporting.

Change management research, and recent examples in the New Zealand public sector, such as the culture changes at the Police over the last decade, give us confidence that it can be done; but getting it done will require extraordinary leadership, investment, tenacity and joined-up effort.

This will be difficult to manage in the parliamentary context characterised by short elector cycles, short attention spans, competitive pressures, changing political leadership, parliamentary agencies that are modestly resourced and no single accountable leader.

In that report, Debbie Francis clearly outlines the challenges, acknowledging that it is hard, but resourcing is crucial. She goes on further:

... making the changes recommended here -

which is similar to the changes recommended in the Bolt report -

... is a significant body of work and will require sustained efforts from agencies and Parties.

It will take three to five years to see meaningful cultural change in the parliamentary workplace that better addresses health, safety and wellbeing risks and reduces or eliminates bullying, harassment, sexual harm or other inappropriate conduct.

This necessity is not new and you can look at the Kate Jenkins's report and others that have pointed to these same challenges. It is not just parliaments; it is also the private sector. We could look at some pretty untidy reports into private sector organisations; it is not new. Not only does it take time to change, it takes resources. I reiterate the need for adequate resourcing to enable change in a safe, sustainable and effective manner is also referred to in these other reports.

Going back to the Francis report:

It is my underlying contention here that Parliament should invest in a range of protective factors that reduce the risks of bullying, harassment and other adverse behaviours. This is likely to require significant additional resources and funding. Factors that create a strong and healthy culture in Parliament will reduce the risks of harm.

There is also comment from the Combined Union as part of this report because the union obviously has a very keen interest in matters related to the people who work in the parliament

and any ministerial services - and in the public service generally. I am focusing more on the parliamentary and ministerial staff here, but the Combined Union response stated in the report:

... we echo the call in this Report to ensure that our parliamentary agencies are resourced to provide appropriate services. We must be mature enough to see that properly funding the work needed to support our Parliament is about the health of our democracy and not partisan politics and ensure our decision-making systems are future proofed to ensure this.

It is not something we should be surprised about. I am willing to stand up in public, outside this place, and say this parliament is under-resourced. It has been under-resourced for years. We have a really important piece of culture change that needs to go on. We need resourcing and that means money and people to deliver the changes needed. We cannot expect our already stretched teams and clerks and other support people who will lead this work to do it without that. It is completely unacceptable to even contemplate that thought. Without the resourcing needed to engage the needed experts in change management, we will be failing in our duty to deliver on the recommendations of Sarah Bolt. The resources needed must be provided. The work required by a change manager is imperative to support the Clerks undertaking their role and those who will also be assisting them in that task.

I note in budget paper 2 Volume 1 on pages 255 and 263, additional funding has been provided in Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) for two additional staff for this purpose in that area. That is great. That is appropriate and important.

From the parliament's perspective, I find it surprising that we have to beg for money to do what every other workplace and department also needs to do and appears to be funded to do to ensure worker safety. We need to remember that it was the government that commissioned the Bolt report. This government commissioned that report for all the right reasons. From my perspective, it is incumbent on the government to adequately fund and resource the change needed to provide a contemporary structure.

I know this is a delicate matter to speak about publicly. I am a bit tired of being silent on this. I know not many in our community think we or the parliament generally should have any additional funding, especially when times are tight, but if we value democracy, we will fund our members properly.

This is exactly the time when the parliament needs to be funded properly for it to hold the government of the day to account and provide a safe workplace for all. This is exactly the time we should be advocating. Some of us have been here for years and know that the parliament has been under-resourced for all that time. It is not new. The necessary changes have not been made over the years. I am going back years and years - a long time and the necessary changes have not been made. Thus, there is now a huge burden of work that needs to be done to address these legacy issues that are not the making of the current leadership team.

We have one senior position that is in the process of being filled and that is helpful. However, that position is not to lead the cultural change piece. We need specific dedicated people to help with that. It requires specific skills, expertise and funding.

Returning briefly to another unacceptable inequity between the Houses is to highlight, in the light of the principle of comity - that is equity and fairness between the Houses - I know

that independent and possibly other opposition party members in the House of Assembly have at least two staff to support their work. They are no more busy than members in this House. I would argue many in this House take on a larger workload through committee work - there being fewer of us. We only have one electorate officer each. Those of us who do not live in Hobart spend a lot of time away from our electorate and there is very little funding to support our staff to travel to Hobart for parliamentary sittings - if we would like that to occur. This arrangement disrespects this House. It disrespects these members in this House. When you consider this is a House of review, I ask, what does it say about the current government's approach to timely scrutiny, accountability and transparency?

Ms O'Connor - Is that a rhetorical question?

Ms FORREST - It is a rhetorical question. I think it says everything we need to know, but I know this is not an area that members normally talk about. It has been amplified in the Budget for all to see. I sincerely hope that even though it is a delicate area to go to, at Estimates committees they might take some of these matters up with the Premier next week. I am happy to take it up with the Treasurer. However, the Premier is the one who needs to make some of these decisions.

I say those final words with a bit of caution. I am not asking that they immediately fund us further. I am talking about the inequity, the disrespect for members of this House and, more importantly, the underfunding of the parliament - particularly in light of us needing to respond to a report that was commissioned by the government, delivered to the government; that the committee was set up to oversee the implementation of the recommendations. We then commissioned a report to look at the structures recommended by Sarah Bolt, in her report, that will lead to change. Change is hard, change takes time and change takes resourcing. I want to see that taken very seriously and not put any of our leadership team across the whole parliament under undue stress because they are trying to do it off the side of their desk. You cannot do that; not to achieve positive outcomes.

There are other matters I could have spoken about, but I have been going longer than I normally do on a budget reply. I thought they were important matters to say. However, given the dire state of the budget, the absence of a path to fiscal sustainability and the fanciful notion of an imaginary surplus, I believe it is appropriate to shine a light on these matters and take time to fully outline the challenges that the budget faces. It is where I started my contribution as well as highlight other key areas that I believe are important. I note the budget papers and look forward to next week.

[2.59 p.m.]

Ms ARMITAGE (Launceston) - Mr President, I thank the government and the Treasurer for the delivery of the 2024-25 Budget.

In the months leading up to this Budget, it was quite clear that we needed to manage our expectations on what it might contain. We knew for some time there would perhaps not be very many presents on Christmas morning. This has come off the back of some pretty turbulent financial conditions nationally and globally. It does not seem as if those conditions will ease up anytime soon, despite holding out quite a lot of hope and despite some people having a serious need for a break from cost-of-living pressures.

Put quite simply, we are getting less, despite paying more. Life's essentials, including mortgages, rent, school, utilities, health services, transport, groceries, phones, internet and almost everything has gone up.

People out there are struggling and they do need relief. Over the past few years we have been through a lot, including a global pandemic - the effects of which continue to ripple through our communities and economies today.

Unfortunately, no-one is coming to save us. We are very much on our own and it is up to us to make sure that we start improving our economic conditions now so we do not pass on the consequences of poor decisions to our children in the years to come.

We have heard much commentary about this budget. Mr Saul Eslake's projections on the position of the Tasmanian economy in the years to come have been discussed at length, and commentary around the topic has been prolific. Mr Eslake forecasts that Tasmanian net debt will rise from \$5.8 billion at the end of the 2026-27 financial year to \$16.3 billion at the end of the 2034-35 financial year. The cost of servicing this debt will be from about \$250 million in 2024-25 to \$730 million in 2034-35, according to Mr Eslake's review.

In an editorial for the *Mercury* in August, Greg Barns stated: 'There's a huge price to pay for overspending.' Based on these figures, that is certainly the case.

What is clear from the budget papers is that the state will be burdened by increasing debt over the next few years. In the editorial for the *Mercury* last week, political editor David Killick stated that: 'Budgets are aspirational documents that are sometimes as accurate as horoscopes.'

If nothing else, budgets are policy agendas which reflect the priorities of the governments that hand them down. I will go into more detail on some of these priorities a little later. However, I will say now that at the present time any approach which offers Tasmanians a little relief from the current cost-of-living situation seems reasonable to me.

The Treasurer described this Budget as a budget for the times. Mr Eslake has stated that the government has consciously chosen not to begin the task of restoring Tasmania's finances to a sustainable condition in the 2024-25 Budget.

There is clearly much to be done. Many different priorities and views are being espoused about the state's financial position now and into the future.

It is vital that the Tasmanian budget reflects our position and spending power and ensures that our economy remains stable. To do this, we need to work with the best available information and not just take advice from experts but listen to the people we represent.

With Mr Eslake's findings and recommendations in mind, I was pleased to hear that the government has committed to introducing no new taxes to Tasmanians.

Average Tasmanians, small and medium business owners and families cannot take any more hits to their own budgets. Pressure is coming at them from all angles and it is just becoming too much.

It will take ongoing conversations in this place, out in the real world with our constituents and listening to our businesses and community groups to come up with the best solutions that meet the needs of a robust public service and which fairly gathers revenue from a broad base of sources. With this in mind, I would like to turn to some specific projects outlined in the Budget.

For some time it has been evident that - based on the cost of dwellings and increasing interest rates - purchasing and renting our homes is becoming more and more expensive. For a number of Tasmanians, borrowing and purchasing a home is simply out of reach. There are a number of existing policies that have been continued in this Budget, including the abolition of stamp duty for first home buyers, purchasing existing properties valued up to \$750,000, although even \$750,000 is getting you even less now than what it once did.

Expanding the MyHome Shared Equity scheme for people on lower incomes to get into the housing market is also helpful. I understand that the income limits are being lifted by 25 per cent for eligible applicants and the government equity share is being increased, which is going to assist a number of individuals and couples on lower incomes to enter into the homeowner market.

I was pleased to see a policy of stimulating supply with the Homes Faster! Partnership Incentive Fund to provide incentives to stimulate the supply of housing. This, I believe, will be a key in the longer term. Combined with policies to promote medium-density dwelling areas and bringing more affordable residential land to market, this should help to make conditions more and more appealing to developers and people who want to build their own homes.

The government also has a role in this space. I can see that the Budget prioritises the government's goal of 10,000 more social and affordable houses by 2032, including 2000 social housing-only homes by 2027. Additionally, providing up to 100 more rapid rehousing homes to women and children escaping family violence will be made available. Millions of dollars in funding is being allocated to supporting Tasmanians in need into safer and more secure housing.

My office receives many inquiries from constituents in housing distress. I am sure other members' offices do too. The need is there, and it does not seem to be abating. Families need safe places to sleep, and it is entirely appropriate for the budget to allocate resources into providing safe accommodation for people who need it.

I have always had a great concern for and a real interest in hospitals and health. The flagship Launceston General Hospital project worth \$580 million will double the size of the emergency department and ideally lead to far better health outcomes for people in the state's north. Upgrades to the LGH are fantastic and they are needed. However, we also need investment in the services that the LGH provides by way of doctors, nurses, support staff, ambulance officers, and the equipment and infrastructure that allow them to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

Obviously, the outpatients program is one area that always needs more funding. I am not sure what the current wait is. I will put a question on notice for the Leader. I recall that for colonoscopies and endoscopies - preventative measures that save our community so much money, the wait for some of these procedures, particularly the normal categories 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 - and I am not sure whether category 4 even exists anymore - but when everyone over 50 gets

a letter from the federal government suggesting that they do a faeces test and send it back, if you get that back telling you that you have faecal blood, then where do you go if you do not have private health insurance, as many people cannot afford, particularly in the current times? How do you actually have preventative medicine? How do you get a colonoscopy when you do not have a cancer or you have not been referred for a category 1 or 2? To me, these are some areas that should be looked at by the government. With all the prevention, it is like anything that goes through the emergency department - and I do note that the emergency department is being extended. One of the issues that we have with preventative medicine is that to solve a problem before it exists is a much better way than people actually getting cancer and having to - hopefully - recover rather than going through a long procedure.

I would hope that the government does look at some of the other areas. I support extra staff, nurses and doctors. I hope that continues. I always have great concern when people criticise our hospital because I believe that makes it even harder to get staff and to entice staff, particularly from English-speaking countries, to come to our hospital to work. No-one wants to come to a hospital where they think they are going to be on call six nights out of seven. I believe it is really important to build up our hospital. I would never criticise our Launceston General Hospital and our staff, who I believe do an absolutely magnificent job, but we certainly need more money, particularly in some of the areas like colonoscopies and endoscopies.

We are seeing the growth of some medical services by way of private investment, including a partnership with the Launceston Health Hub. I commend Dr Jerome Muir Wilson and his wife Jaclyn for the work they have done at the Launceston Health Hub. They have partnered with the government to improve health outcomes in Launceston. It shows that not only is there a need for additional health providers and support services in Launceston, but also there is the capacity, appetite and willingness to undertake projects to provide healthcare facilities where the conditions allow.

What we saw in February this year, unfortunately, was a decision of Calvary Health Care to withdraw from the Launceston co-located hospital project. As Dr John Saul, then president of the AMA Tasmania, said at the time:

A modern private hospital is essential to support a robust public health system. It provides alternative patient care options and reduces the demand on the state ...

Additionally, Dr Saul pointed out:

It helps to attract and retain staff ... who want to work in both private and public, as well as provide additional services that the public system can purchase if required.

To have that project or have that hospital across the road from our public hospital seemed an ideal situation. A project like this helps to give us options, not just the public health system but the community it services.

At this stage there is no indication how the co-located hospital will play out. There is still not yet any private provider that has put their hand up to say they will step into Calvary's place. When I asked a question on the floor earlier this year, I was advised that the total costs incurred

on the project since 2021 were approximately \$5.4 million. This is already quite a lot of money, and the absolute worst outcome would be to see the work already done be in vain.

I understand that the government cannot control the market and cannot compel any private provider to partner on this project. We need to be doing everything possible to entice a private provider to enter into a partnership such as this. I think it was very sad to see the Anne O'Byrne Centre demolished only to be used as a car park. Obviously, we need a car park while the development is going on across the road at the Launceston General Hospital, but of course the Anne O'Byrne Centre was to be the site of the new private hospital. Who knows whether that will ever happen or whether it will remain a car park. It is a very sad situation indeed.

A further issue which has been raised with me in recent days is the progress of the northern hospice project. The Allambi site in Howick Street in Launceston was announced earlier in the year. Since 2007, the Friends of the Northern Hospice have campaigned for facilities such as this, and the journey is not over yet. They have campaigned vigorously for years for a hospice, which has the potential to meaningfully reduce the stresses that palliative care places on the Launceston General Hospital.

The families of people in palliative care still report a number of poor experiences and that is not an outcome that we should stand for - not for ourselves and not for others. To this end, the funding of \$20 million allocated over four years in the Budget from the 2023-24 financial year hopefully will see this project come to fruition. I understand the redevelopment is due to be completed in late 2026.

Anything we can do to ensure this project is delivered on time will benefit not only those who will use the hospice but also the Launceston General Hospital, the St Luke's Melwood wing - they do a wonderful job in the meantime, but with limited beds - and all the allied health services that are involved in end-of-life care.

I also believe the government is making some other sound investments in the health infrastructure in the state's north, including the new purpose-built mental health precinct; the new \$9 million four-bed mother and baby unit at the Health Hub; the pilot of an emergency mental health co-response service and funding of the Northern Heart Centre, which will provide additional cardiac catheterisation laboratory capacity, 16 inpatient beds and seven coronary care unit beds co-located with the ICU, and 20 additional public rehabilitation or sub-acute beds at the Launceston Health Hub. Where would we be without our new Launceston Health Hub?

It is clear that what will be key to ensuring northern Tasmania's long-term health management will be investing not just in infrastructure but in people. All too often we see infrastructure built because that can be opened and a ribbon can be cut, but it is very important to have people in those buildings. Combined with allied health service providers and promoting preventative health organisations to carry out their work in our communities, this will be the only way that we can ensure that those living in northern Tasmania have the ability to access services that will help them live their healthiest lives without needing to go to Hobart or interstate for treatments and assessments.

The spend on infrastructure has been a topic with significant commentary. Many people have differing opinions on it. In his budget speech, the Treasurer indicated a spend of

\$5.1 billion in infrastructure over the next four years, with \$1.9 billion for our roads and bridges, \$650 million on our hospitals and \$359 million for our schools and education facilities.

Mr Eslake, in his review of the state's finances, said that:

Tasmania will over the next three years ... be running the largest public sector infrastructure program, relative to the size of its economy, of any state or territory.

Mr Eslake's review also questions whether Tasmania can afford to do this. There are undoubtedly certain projects which the government has no choice but to fund on an ongoing basis. This includes investing in and upgrading and building school and education infrastructure, and investing in health projects, which to my mind are non-negotiable. They will be essential for our state to be prioritising. Then there are certain projects that leave me a bit bewildered, such as the Macquarie Point Stadium project, which I know also has many others scratching their heads.

Ms O'Connor - Hear, hear.

Ms ARMITAGE - At this stage, it is evident that a new stadium will be constructed sooner or later. What I am not understanding is why the government is so reluctant to consider the alternative stadium proposal - Stadium 2.0 as some are calling it. What we have heard so far is that it is underwritten by private investors. Face it, there will be budget overruns on this project. Stadium 2.0 includes residential apartments, health services and recreational facilities. It also signals that the government is willing to support innovation and growth in the private sector by choosing to partner with private companies to make the stadium a reality.

Stadium 2.0 has the support of the RSL and bypasses the myriad issues that come with constructing the stadium at Macquarie Point, including the relocation of sewage tanks and the challenge of fitting the proposed design on the current site. It is all very well for the government to describe a partnership for the Stadium 2.0 project as risky, but so far I have not heard why this is the case. To my mind, it sounds like a far lower risk because we have had assurances that cost overruns will be met by private investors and not from the public purse.

I am disappointed at this stage that the government seems so unwilling to look at alternative proposals and to make any compromises that might make the stadium project more palatable to more people within the community. At a briefing with the group from Stadium 2.0 in the past, I recall they showed an old map which showed that the site for Stadium 2.0 was actually called Macquarie Point. I believe that Tasmania should have its own AFL team, but I am still unsure whether we are making a fair and even trade for it.

Some other areas relating to sport that I would like to mention I would call preventative health. I am pleased to see that bowls clubs have been recognised in the Budget. I note there is \$980,000 for stage 1 of a high performance training centre for Kings Meadows Bowls Club and \$500,000 for extensions and a change room upgrade for the South Hobart Football Club, which is very good. On the weekend, I went up to Launceston City Football Club - and I note it is the largest soccer club in Tasmania. I am advised there are 700 playing members, including over 550 junior and youth players, and their members live in over 70 suburbs and several local government areas in northern Tasmania. They are desperately in need of further funding to complete their renovations. I noticed the change rooms that they had built and how important

it is, particularly for young players, male and female, to have facilities. Even though I note that it was in South Hobart, I am really pleased to see that sport is getting funding. It is a shame for the Launceston City Football Club to have to go from election cycle to election cycle to try to complete stage 2, to try to get funding from members when they are coming up; I guess it could be called pork-barreling when it is coming up to elections.

I also noticed \$8 million for the Silverdome upgrade, but I could not seem to find - and maybe I am just not looking in the right spot - what that was actually for. Perhaps the leader could tell me. I have had a meeting with the minister for Sport in previous times with regards to cycling; I think it was last year when they had the national cycling championships there. I think it was national cycling championships, but I know they certainly had overseas competitors, if not. The concern was raised with regard to the timber surface for cycling and how the Silverdome could be used so much more if some small changes were made. I am just wondering what the \$8 million was, whether it actually is going to resurfacing some of that for cycling so more sports can use the Silverdome or what the situation is.

Safety is also a real issue in our community. I was pleased to see extra funding to recruit a further 60 additional police officers to allow the establishment of a permanent strike force team with a focus on serial offenders. I note in last year's Police, Fire and Emergency Annual Report, that the Launceston district fared very badly with regard to crime compared with other districts. I am advised that this year will be no different.

What do we do? What are we doing wrong in Launceston? What is the change? I can recall one of our previous members, Ivan Dean, in the past had referred to Launceston, I think the word he used was 'Little Chicago' at one stage, which I probably took offence at; however, it is really concerning when we are doing so much more badly in Launceston than we are in other areas.

I also understand that one of the reasons for the northern prison, which obviously is no longer on the radar, was to allow northern inmates to be closer to family and friends. What I find difficult to understand with regard to the proposed new Ashley Detention Centre - and I have asked this question on a number of occasions and really not been given an answer that I consider - is what will be built in the south. Why is there not a similar facility to be located in the north to allow these young people access, or easier access, to family and friends, if surely this is important for their rehabilitation? It was considered for people in prison so that they could be closer to their families, but when it comes to our young people, we are looking to have one detention centre in the south. I have not been able to get an answer apart from being continually told that it is because there will be more facilities in the south for them.

Ms Forrest - More support services, I think they say.

Ms ARMITAGE - More support services - that is the word, thank you, member for Murchison. That is quite disappointing though for young people who may have easier access to their families in the north.

Ms Forrest - Particularly when you think about the locations that some of these young people, sadly, come from.

Ms ARMITAGE - Absolutely, and particularly when I am just looking at the annual report for Police, Fire and Emergency to say that the north of the state is several times worse than the south.

Ms Forrest - Sadly, it is.

Ms ARMITAGE - However, this is where we are going to put our detention centre.

Ms O'Connor - It was going to be one north and one south in the original Ashley closure plan.

Ms ARMITAGE - It was, but the word is 'was'.

Ms Forrest - Therein lies the problem.

Ms ARMITAGE - Therein lies the problem, so perhaps we will continue to ask some questions there.

I was very pleased to see additional funding for an additional custodial inspector to allow increased monitoring of Ashley Youth Detention Centre. We know what a wonderful job our Custodial Inspector does and any funding that he can access is well and truly deserved.

Leader, the transport hub is one of the areas that I am really interested in. I have asked questions earlier in the year on delivering the best, secure, new home for the Northern Regional Transit Centre. I did get the response from the minister, Mr Abetz, to say that yes, they did have a lease on the property at St John Street and that it was subject to council approval as promised during the election to take the buses out of the temporary shelter on Lower Charles. However, there does seem to be a deathly silence and nothing happening. I am wondering, it has been with council now for a considerable number of months, it has been quite some time ago that I asked the question and was told that it was subject to council approval. It would be really good to know, and if council are being tardy, I would be very happy to chase them up. I have regular conversations with them and I am -

Mrs Hiscutt - You can ask all of them in parliament.

Ms ARMITAGE - Oh no, I would chase it up with the new CEO. I am very happy to chase it up and find out what is actually happening because I was told it was happening and I have seen nothing. I am very close to that area and no-one who I know has heard anything about it, so if you could, that would be absolutely wonderful.

Just going back to Macquarie Point, the wastewater treatment plant relocation is another issue that has been on the agenda for a long time. The government has committed a total of \$224 million to support the relocation of the Macquarie Point wastewater treatment plant and agreed to share potential shortfall costs with TasWater, which I hate to think what they might be, in direct proportion to the initial contribution by the two parties. This commitment is reflected in the 2024-25 Budget and forward Estimates, noting that \$43.5 million has been provided to TasWater to date. While the total commitment is based on the budget for the project, given the inflationary impacts on infrastructure projects, it is possible the final project costs will exceed this budget. Under the terms of the established agreement, proportional increased contribution may be required to be made by the government to meet any project cost

overruns, which is concerning. This is required to be paid following completion of the project, which is currently expected in 2026-27.

Leader, I said I am pleased to see a lot of the developments that are happening such as the new four-bed mother and baby unit in Launceston; I think that is a wonderful mental health precinct. The work that Dr Jerome Muir Wilson is doing in conjunction with the government and - Jerome and his wife Jaclyn - is absolutely amazing. Without them, I am not sure where we would be with the number of smaller doctors' surgeries that have closed. Jerome has a health hub in Wellington Street and it has childcare. It does not matter what you need; it is a one-stop shop. It has plenty of parking, which is really wonderful. I am also pleased to see the securing of a new purpose-built home for the Royal Flying Doctor Service at the airport, something that is very close to the member for Windermere's heart and certainly a great service.

Leader, I have always believed that we cut our cloth to meet our needs and if you cannot afford it, then you simply cannot have it, whether it be a home budget or a government budget. Mr Eslake very clearly outlines a number of issues in the Budget and I am concerned. However, I do appreciate that our public servants, be they in health, fire and emergency, police and the list goes on, need to be paid. Despite my misgivings, I will support the Budget.

[3.29 p.m.]

Mr DUIGAN (Windermere - Minister for Energy and Renewables) - Mr President, it gives me great pleasure to stand and speak to the 2024-25 Tasmanian state Budget, a budget that demonstrates how this government is investing in our community, supporting Tasmanians with cost of living and continuing to take action to deliver our 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's Future. As has been noted, in challenging economic times, this Budget is considered and responsible. It contains deliverable commitments and initiatives, takes action on the things that matter most to Tasmanians, and keeps our economy strong.

Understanding that cost-of-living pressures are impacting Tasmanians, it provides \$460 million in additional relief, including on power bills and investment in jobs and creating infrastructure to support and buoy our economy. This is in addition to a stronger focus on key services including health, housing, education and transport. The Budget delivers on election commitments as well as key areas across all our portfolios, growing the economy and creating jobs while supporting essential services.

I am very pleased to speak about budget impacts across my electorate of Windermere and my portfolio of Energy and Renewables and my portfolio of Parks and Environment. I am very pleased and proud of the sensible investments we have committed to in delivering what matters: upgrading our schools, roads, community and sporting facilities; improving health and public transport services; creating clean, reliable and affordable energy for our future and to grow our economy; investing in our parks and reserves so that both Tasmanians and visitors can continue to enjoy what makes this part of the world so special; working to protect and conserve our environment, in particular, our unique and threatened species; and building our circular economy through climate change initiatives, initiatives in waste and recycling and building new industries through clean e-fuels for the future.

In Windermere, I am pleased to say that the Budget includes infrastructure investments in the things that matter. We have covered in some detail the School Building Blitz and I am very pleased to note that there are funds for the Port Dalrymple and South George Town

Primary School. Indeed, as every member who has spoken about those types of things has said, they are needed and warmly welcomed by those school communities.

We are also continuing to invest in the East Tamar Highway, of course, the road between Launceston and George Town. The Northern Regional Transit Centre and Metro Bus Exchange, while based in Launceston, will benefit the whole region with contemporary public transport options.

Keeping fit and active and participating in local sports is something that not only keeps our communities healthy, but also keeps us connected and is great for our kids. That is why I am pleased to see that the Budget continues to invest in our sporting clubs and facilities. In particular, one I bang on about fairly regularly is the Northern Suburbs Community Recreation Hub, which I was pleased to visit. It is progressing well. There is also a \$40 million plus investment there and a commitment in this Budget for the redevelopment of the Elphin Sports Centre, which is much needed and overdue and will be joy to the ears of the local basketball community.

The Budget has a strong focus on supporting jobs and industry to grow. A key example in my electorate, in the Energy portfolio, is through a \$5 million investment over the next three years to support a renewable energy services hub at Bell Bay, a bit of a hobby horse of mine. Bell Bay is the perfect location for this hub with its deep-water port, its already established infrastructure and highly experienced and skilled workforce. Our services hub will take advantage of this to attract industry investment and leverage our natural assets. As we look at offshore wind developments in Tasmania and elsewhere, that is a powerful asset for Tasmania.

The Tasmanian government is continuing to deliver for Tasmanians, with more than \$82 million invested in energy and renewables initiatives over the next four years. Our government's significant investment in renewables will create more jobs and ensure Tasmanians continue to have the lowest power prices in the nation.

Renewable energy generation is critical to our state's economy. It has always been. I predict it will be long into the future. As a 100 per cent renewable jurisdiction, businesses and industries want to operate here. Electricity and electrifying industries are a key component of growing our economy and keeping our clean and green brand strong.

Tasmania has always been a pioneer in hydropower development and our continued investment will be key to providing low-cost, reliable, clean energy and be a significant driver of state growth into the future. The planned redevelopment of existing assets such as the Tarraleah power scheme and the potential development of new assets such as the Cethana pumped hydro project are very large and complex infrastructure projects. We cannot forget the significant planned private sector investment in wind and solar generation projects that are critical to support our renewable energy agenda.

Reflecting the quality of our wind resources, which have been on full display in the last couple of weeks, developers have identified over 6 gigawatts of installed capacity, representing billions of dollars of investment in our state, aiming to commence commercial operations by the end of 2030. Some of these projects include large-scale wind projects like Bell Bay Wind Farm, Whaleback Ridge, North East Wind, Robbins Island and St Patricks Plains, and solar projects at Connorville, 'Dungrove' farm and Bell Bay. Load projects also work hand-in-hand

with generation, with HIF Global and ABEL progressing e-fuels projects in Burnie and at Bell Bay. That is to name but a few of the very large projects that are on the energy horizon.

Combined, these energy sector investments represent the largest infrastructure investments in this state's history and they amount to significantly more than \$10 billion. That is why we are investing in bringing on new generation in Tasmania, with the Budget providing \$14.4 million over four years for the renewable energy approval pathway - the REAP - to streamline investment for major renewable projects. This will ensure that Tasmania is one of the easiest places to invest for renewable energy proponents. REAP will bring more resources to agencies to improve processes and support proponents to navigate the approvals pathways.

Tasmania's reputation as a renewable energy powerhouse means we are ideally positioned to take advantage of opportunities to create jobs and future industries.

Our green hydrogen vision sets out in our Tasmanian Renewable Hydrogen Action Plan that Tasmania should be a leader in large-scale green hydrogen production by 2030. The Budget enables the Tasmanian government to realise this vision with \$11 million allocated to delivering a green hydrogen hub at Bell Bay, which is supported by \$70 million of co-investment from the Australian Government.

Our government acknowledges the challenge faced by many Tasmanians with cost-of-living pressures. That is why the state government is proud to have already delivered a one-off \$250 credit to more than 254,000 Tasmanian households and a \$300 one-off energy credit to 35,000 small businesses. Additionally, the Budget goes further in supporting our small businesses through a \$1.8 million Energy Efficiency Audit Grants Program, which is aimed at reducing operating costs. I was pleased to be at the Mount Nelson Medical Centre just the other day to announce this. Alongside me was Rob Mallett, the CEO of the Tasmanian Small Business Council, who said:

... the energy audit grants will educate and support small business to better understand their energy usage and allow them to make sensible decisions in future infrastructure purchases ...

The best energy savings are those instances where we do not need to use energy at all. Energy audits will enable the Tasmanian small business sector to better understand their usage and invest wisely in lowering their ongoing costs. The Budget ensures economic growth alongside sensible debt management and continues to provide a business-friendly investment environment with no new or increased taxes.

Tasmania's emissions profile is the envy of the nation and, indeed, the world. We have already achieved our legislated target of net zero emissions by 2030. While our economy and population have continued to grow, we have reduced our total greenhouse gas emissions by 0.68 megatons of carbon dioxide equivalent from 2021-22.

Ms O'CONNOR - You should have the grace to thank our forests.

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you very much. The most recent data shows that Tasmania's emissions were negative 4.34 megatons of carbon dioxide equivalent, meaning our emissions reduced by 122.2 per cent since 1990. The reduction is because we take more carbon dioxide out of the air than we emit, offsetting all our greenhouse gas emissions. However, we know we

must continue to invest, which is why the Budget provides more than \$21 million to maintain our nation-leading net zero status and build the Tasmanian circular economy. We are taking real action, providing a further \$600 000 toward our \$4 million low emissions livestock grants program. This will reduce carbon dioxide levels equivalent to taking 7000 cars off the road. Livestock are a significant contributor to Tasmania's greenhouse gas emissions, even greater than the emissions from our entire transport sector, therefore it is an important investment. This is just one more way we can reduce our emissions to ensure we continue to meet our target of net zero or lower from 2030.

Because climate change is an integrated issue, we are continuing our work under our ambitious *Climate Change (State Action) Act*, developing emissions reduction and resilience plans for industry and government. These cross-cutting plans will create a framework for industries and government to work together to reduce our collective emissions and to strengthen our state's ability to adapt to a changing climate.

We know Tasmania's pristine natural environment and its unique flora and fauna are among its greatest assets. As a government, this is something we are very proud of, which is why we are continuing to invest in conservation, research and community programs that protect, restore and improve our natural assets and our unique species. This government is about providing certainty and stability for Tasmanians, keeping our economy strong and supporting our regional communities while protecting those assets most important to us all.

The Budget includes more than \$736 million in operating funding for the Parks and Environment portfolio over the next four years, a substantial sum of money, I am sure you all agree. This sum includes more than \$44 million in the next year for our environmental management, analytical services and threatened species. This is despite some commentary to the contrary. It is \$14 million more than was available in the previous year. There is also \$17.1 million for natural values management, including support for our natural resource management bodies and Landcare Tasmania. These organisations play a valuable role in improving, protecting and maintaining our natural assets.

We know Tasmania is world renowned for its rich biodiversity and unique plants, animals and ecosystems. This government takes its responsibility for the protection of threatened species very seriously. As part of our 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's Future, the Budget invests \$8 million in our Threatened Species Fund, increasing our overall funding commitment to support this vital work. This commitment is on top of the \$2.1 million to establish a captive breeding program for the Maugean skate, \$1 million to save the swift parrot, \$2.5 million to construct the orange-bellied parrot captive breeding facility, and ongoing funding to continue the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program. We have been very clear about our Threatened Species Fund, including funding for the orange-bellied parrot. I am pleased to report our captive breeding program continues to result in successful releases into the wild to boost that vulnerable native population.

As part of the action we are taking to support conservation efforts for our important priority species, I was pleased to visit Seahorse World at Beauty Point recently and see the breeding program for both the spotted and red handfish firsthand. While very little is known about handfishes generally, they are interesting little fishes. I learned a great deal about them. These unique species are endemic to Tasmanian waters and they will be a key focus of our threatened species strategy, ensuring the species can survive and flourish in the wild and protecting them from further threats.

In protecting our environment, we want to build confidence in our waste and resource recovery sectors while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution. As an island state, managing our waste is incredibly important in ensuring we maintain our environment and Tasmania's brand image. In doing so, we are progressing initiatives that will grow our circular economy and help Tasmania be a place where nothing is wasted. We are committed to introducing a container refund scheme, which we know will reduce litter and incentivise recycling and resource recovery.

An outstanding example of innovative waste management that is driving change for our economy, our environment and our communities is demonstrated at the Dulverton Waste Management facility, a state-of-the-art regional organics facility in Tasmania's north-west. I was very pleased to join the opening of this \$32 million facility in July, which is expected to divert 7500 tonnes of organic waste away from landfill and service the aquaculture, dairy, brewery, poultry and other primary industries in a win for both the environment and industry. This facility supported more than 90 jobs during its construction and there will be six full-time employment opportunities ongoing. This is one example of how our landfill levy is enabling us to invest in improved waste management across the state and create new jobs and industries.

We are encouraging households and businesses to rethink their approach to waste as we transition to the circular economy. This will drive investment in other alternatives to landfill, and see more materials recovered from waste streams and turned into new and valuable products. We are providing \$3.5 million through the Waste and Resource Recovery Board to support a range of projects across local government, schools, industry and the resource recovery sector. This is a win for the environment and for jobs, creating new jobs and business opportunities in that sector. I look forward to continuing developments in waste and resource recovery in coming years.

The government has strengthened the Environment Protection Authority's role as an independent environmental regulator to ensure comprehensive environmental monitoring and regulation. The Budget provides \$85 million to the EPA to support its operations, which is an increase from previous years. Our investment will support increased staffing in key positions in environmental assessment and the scientific and technical areas to deal with the increasing number of large and complex projects submitted for consideration and approval by the EPA board.

As our economy grows and we continue to see investor interest in Tasmania - particularly in renewable energy projects, transmission lines and green hydrogen production facilities as well as activities such as mines and quarries - these projects flow through to the EPA for assessment. The EPA also continues to provide a significant assessment role in major Tasmanian projects such as Marinus Link, North East Wind and Whaleback Ridge wind farms, major projects under the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*.

This increase in investor activity and, therefore, environmental assessment is demonstrated by projects before the EPA. As at 14 August 2024 I am advised the EPA had 112 proposals before it for assessment compared with an average of 50 proposals only four years ago, in 2020.

The EPA has a critical role in regulating our marine environment, and a key part of this is the Environmental Standards for Tasmanian Marine Finfish Farming, which members will be familiar with. These standards strengthen an already robust environmental regulatory system

for marine fish farming in Tasmania and foster environmentally sustainable fish farming practices. The work of the EPA continues the Tasmanian government's commitment to the protection of Tasmania's environment and best-practice environmental management.

Ensuring Tasmania's parks and reserves remain affordable and accessible is a key part of the Budget. At a time when cost of living is biting, we want to ensure our parks and reserves remain an exciting and valued recreational choice. Tasmania's parks and reserves are the cornerstone of our visitor economy, and we are continuing to invest in them to deliver outstanding experiences for both Tasmanians and visitors.

A key part of making our parks and reserves accessible is providing disability access. We understand that the right infrastructure can vastly improve access for those with limited mobility, which is why we are investing \$1.8 million to provide better disability access facilities and mobility equipment at key sites around the state.

We recognise that we must continue to invest in our parks to keep our competitive advantage, and that is why we are providing more than \$340 million to maintain and operate our Parks and Wildlife Service. In addition, we are investing \$1.6 million to deliver a statewide parks online booking system. This contemporary booking platform for parks and parks products and information includes campsite bookings, and will make it easier for visitors to plan their time and choose their experience in our parks and reserves.

It is vital that we continue to invest in our parks and reserves infrastructure and deliver on new projects so these iconic places can be enjoyed for years to come. That is why we have confirmed more than \$145 million in new and ongoing infrastructure investment in the Budget. This includes key projects that will provide outstanding and unique visitor experiences such as upgrades at Maria Island, Cockle Creek, Flinders Island and Ben Lomond. We are continuing to invest in our \$40 million, multi-day, hut-based Next Iconic Walk in the Tyndall Range, which is progressing well. Public consultation sessions were recently hosted across the state in Queenstown, Ulverstone, Launceston and Hobart for the public and tourism operators to better understand the project, meet with the architects and see the exciting hut design concepts.

Sustainable tourism growth is important. We are planning for this by investing in our parks with high visitor attraction, including \$14 million for a new visitor gateway at Freycinet National Park; \$7.8 million to enhance Mount Field as a year-round destination, including improving accommodation options; and progressing the Cradle Mountain Master Plan projects.

As part of our plan for Tasmania, we are developing unique experiences in the Dial Range, along with improvements to amenities at The Nut State Reserve. We acknowledge that this spectacular area of the north-west continues to be a tourism drawcard, with visitors enjoying experiences at Highfield House, and Hursey Seafoods taking out the top gong as part of the National Seafood Industry Awards. Congratulations to Hursey Seafoods.

We recognise the global significance of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and want to ensure it is experienced, celebrated and shared with the world. The TWWHA encompasses exceptional natural beauty, and contains biological and geological features of outstanding global significance, containing a diversity of unique flora and fauna. It contains exceptional cultural heritage, reflecting the long occupation of the area by Tasmania's Aboriginal people, stretching back more than 40,000 years.

We strive to manage the area on behalf of the Australian Government and the world in a way that respects its natural and cultural heritage values. It would be fair to say that the Tasmanian government is doing the heavy lifting when it comes to funding the important work of protecting the TWWHA. It regularly contributes over and above the funding received through the partnership agreement with the Commonwealth, and we would welcome all members here who are passionate about our World Heritage Area to lobby the federal government to contribute their fair share in protecting -

Ms O'Connor - Are you lobbying?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, I am.

Ms O'Connor - Okay, just checking.

Mr DUIGAN - In fact, I wrote one today - protecting the TWWHA for generations to come. We are committed to sustainable management of our environment, balancing protection with sharing our unique places with Tasmanians and the world, now and into the future.

Another important function under my portfolio is Land Tasmania and the Land Titles Office. This crucial function for all property transactions in Tasmania is supported with more than \$95 million over the forward Estimates. Many Tasmanians and many members here will be familiar with the LIST service, and this investment supports that excellent product.

Just recently, I was proud to announce that Tasmania has commenced electronic conveyancing. This is a fantastic milestone and I want to acknowledge the significant work that has gone into moving Tasmania's land transactions into the digital era, providing a faster, smoother and more efficient transaction service for business and those dealing in the property sector.

Another area I am proud to be responsible for is the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens. The gardens are Australia's second oldest botanical garden. It has a longstanding position in the world network of botanic gardens, attracting almost half a million visitors every year. The Budget continues to support the gardens with our investment funding infrastructure upgrades to the visitor centre, improved disability parking, new lighting and an elevated pedestrian path which will enhance accessibility. I was very pleased to recently visit the garden with the Chair and the Director to see the construction happening apace. Refurbishment works are expected to be completed over the course of the coming year.

In conclusion, there is a lot to be excited about in the Budget. Our government believes in keeping our economy strong and that now is not the time for the government to withdraw investments in projects that continue to employ Tasmanians and keep our businesses alive. This is why this Budget continues to invest in infrastructure and deliver the services that Tasmanians expect, such as health, education and housing. As a government, we are funding what matters to Tasmanians and we are getting on with the job of delivering. I congratulate the Treasurer on the 2024-25 Budget and look forward to delivering for the people of Windermere and Tasmania. I note the Budget.

[3.56 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre) - Mr President, I rise to make my contribution to the reply to the Treasurer's 2024-25 Budget speech. It is for the 51st Parliament of Tasmania. I have

listened to quite a few of the budget speeches over the years and they always sound quite positive when they are delivered on the Floor of the other place; also, when you read back through the speech, very positive aspects are always highlighted.

It is only when you start to really drill down into them - and I acknowledge the contribution of previous members for the work they have done in providing their views around what was presented on Thursday a week ago for Tasmanians to digest. It is going to take some digesting, given most of the commentary that I have read - and my look through the budget papers initially - does not paint a very rosy picture for Tasmania, particularly when expectations are extremely high across our communities. I will come back to those 15 pages of election commitments as I make my way through the Budget.

I acknowledge the government's full response to the recommendations of the commission of inquiry. It contains the additional outlays in cost-of-living relief and stronger public services including in health, housing, education and transport. You can always add to those the police and the work they do in emergency services; law and order is also one of those areas where the community has a high expectation that the government will support the people who live in those communities around that particular area.

It is not surprising that the government is trying to be everything to everybody. You cannot and you cannot have everything that you would like to have. We do not live in an ideal world, sadly, and there appear to be many forces that are working against our state, every other state and every other country around the world when it comes to sourcing goods and manufacturing, and the list goes on and on, around those particular items. They all impact on the cost of living and the pressures that come with that; the cost of doing business.

Sitting suspended from 4 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

MOTION

Budget Papers and Appropriation Bills (No. 1 and No. 2) 2024 - Noting

Resumed from above.

Ms RATTRAY - Mr President, prior to the break I was making the comment about the cost pressures, not only living cost pressures but also the cost of doing business across all areas that generate the economy for Tasmania. It is a real challenge and the government has provided a number of avenues of relief. I think somewhere in the budget papers it talks about 100 of those initiatives - yes, 100 different concessions are available supporting the most vulnerable Tasmanians with rising cost-of-living pressures. That includes support for energy bills and also includes small business.

They are significant dollar amounts when you add them up. That is the real key to anything that a government decides to put its effort into. When you make it fair and equitable right across the entire community, it costs a lot of money. The community generally understands that by taking the support in one hand, it has to be paid for by another hand. The government still relies on the community and the Australian Government for the funding to support what is needed right across our communities.

I am not going to go through every part of the government's glossy - that is for other members in this place to do - but as always they are significant. Those who are fortunate to be recipients of those initiatives certainly would appreciate that they are really important to whether they balance their household budget, whether it is a support for people in schools to help with bus fares, school and housing costs, and emergency food relief. We know how much pressure there has been from non-government organisations who provide myriad services across our communities. One would question how on earth the communities would function without the likes of Anglicare and COTA - all those community service groups that have a huge impact on the health and wellbeing of those who live among us.

It is very difficult to argue against those to say the government should not be doing this and the government should not be doing that because they do have a place in our community. However, it is to what extent that you do that when you have a budget with tight pressures. I talked about the big numbers. In relation to those big numbers, the government is providing \$1.8 million in a small business energy audit program so that people can see how they are using their energy and how efficient it is and what other aspects they might be able to put into place.

That is \$460 million over four years for the electricity bill relief. That includes bus fares, supporting pensioners with the cost of local government rates, water and sewerage concessions and the healthy school lunches saving families up to \$950 a year. I expect that is possibly for two or three children. Free TV in major public hospitals, saving patients up to \$80 a week. There has to be question marks about some support that is provided. Again, when they are a positive impact on those you represent, it is difficult to argue against them.

Mrs Hiscutt - That one is about being equal. The TVs in Hobart are free and you are paying for them in North West Regional Hospital. It is complete inequity.

Ms RATTRAY - In the Launceston hospital as well.

That is what I mean, you have to be equitable. Yet, here we are. Once you put something in place for one, you have to be consistent and have it across the board.

It is a real balancing act. I do not envy the job of the Treasurer of this state in any way, shape or form, or Treasury, for that matter. I am sure the Treasurer has not put every part of this Budget together. There would be a lot of input from ministers, department heads and the like. It is a massive job. I do not envy them trying to pick winners - who receives funding or not; which project gets a guernsey and which does not. It is not something for the faint-hearted.

The member for Launceston has talked a lot about health facilities and the challenges around that for northern Tasmania. It is essential that people have access to appropriate health services, particularly in the preventative space. Fewer presentations to accident and emergency, to specialists and the like are going to take pressure off the health system. That is an important aspect and what I believe is the real function and the focus of the government: health, education, infrastructure, and law and order - the four biggies.

A lot has been said by commentators across the board when it comes to the release of the budget. They come into our inbox, mostly on Friday mornings and thereafter. It was no different this time around, even though we are dealing with the budget in September because of the election. I will get to the 15 pages of election commitments. It was stated in one of the pieces of media I received that the government had been acutely aware of the high, uncontrolled

level of debt. It was clear to anyone who was listening to the chatter prior to the debate - there are always a few snippets put out to prepare people for what might be coming. It appeared that knowledge and understanding did not present itself through the budget papers, that yes, there is a really tight fiscal issue for the state and what did the government choose to do? They chose to almost spend their way out of it.

Ms Forrest - Make it worse.

Ms RATTRAY - Well, I had better not put words in the Treasurer's -

Ms Forrest - To look the other way and kick the can down the road.

Ms RATTRAY - Yes, well, that has been mentioned a number of times - kicking the can down the road. It is really clear that things are not okay. When you are talking about the level of debt and we are looking at 2029 before there is a surplus, who knows -

Ms Forrest - That is not even true, though.

Ms RATTRAY - Well, that was what was presented.

Ms Forrest - But they are also cutting the expenditure on services, 17 per cent reduction over three years. That is the reality.

Ms RATTRAY - By 17 per cent. So, being able to provide the services, keep people employed, keep confidence across the community - you have to have confidence across the community, not just the business sector. Yes, it certainly helps with the business sector, whether it be manufacturing or agriculture or whatever that might look like, it is certainly a positive for the communities that I represent. The milk prices are up; that is a good sign. It is a good sign that dairy farmers are making enough money to cover their expenses and perhaps increase their herd or buy a new tractor. Those things are positive and that spins off across the community. If that confidence is not across the board, then it is pretty difficult.

As we know, the borrowing costs will more than double and then possibly some more, and the superannuation liability just continues to grow. The member for Murchison, as she always is, was very clear in her message about that. It does not get lost on those who do not have that same level of understanding. She made it very clear that this government and the previous government have not addressed that particular issue. If you are in your own business and you do not address superannuation liability and put the funds away for it - and the member for Prosser will know this intimately - you are in trouble. I have known businesses that have not made provision for their employees' superannuation commitments and it is a nasty place to be because every time you pick -

Ms Forrest - Most of them have to pay when it falls due. It is not like this defined benefit liability that we got.

Ms RATTRAY - No, but it is still a liability.

Ms Forrest - You will make provision for it, certainly.

Ms RATTRAY - That is right.

We have talked or we have heard a little bit about the budget efficiency dividends and there was already some nervousness, if you like, amongst departments right across the board around the initial efficiency dividend that was expected to be found by each department. Where do you find it? Do you start selling off some assets to feed the Department of Education and decide that no, we no longer can keep that particular piece of land, it needs to be gone, or that particular building? Do we start looking at what the government has in their area of responsibility? Do we end up selling another building and then renting something back because that is also something that has been part of previous governments' ways that they have moved forward?

In the good old days, Mr President, you will remember well because you had an office up on the corner where now the Tasman sits up there and they were part of the parliament, even though they had that funny walkway, and now the building is owned and the government of the day leases back the West Wing - remember, we had a West Wing?

I expect that there needs to be not only an audit to assist small businesses in running their businesses and making ends meet, but there needs to be an audit of what government has and what is surplus to requirements. But you always have to be careful that you do not sell the farm because in this day and age, you will never be able to buy it back.

Mrs Hiscutt - Through you, Mr President, like the Hayes prison farm. Should I mention it?

Mr PRESIDENT - And Tarraleah, may I add.

Ms RATTRAY - And Tarraleah. There are some things, Mr President, that you should always hang on to.

I know that there is a committee on foot at the moment, but there would not be a time that goes by where somebody who makes a representation - and it is all on the public record - about if only there was still the farm for those prisoners who need to get out and perhaps do some manual work to provide some purpose in their life and perhaps gain some skills that they have not necessarily used for a long time.

Ms Armitage - As we saw in South Australia.

Ms RATTRAY - As we saw in South Australia, with the olive oil.

Ms Armitage - And the milk, the dairy.

Ms RATTRAY - The dairy, the pews. There were a number of industries connected to South Australian Corrections - very successful, including dairy farms. Four days on, three days off, that is your roster; keeps going around; purpose; skills; meaningful work - certainly skills that would be well suited to Tasmania.

I know that we will talk more next week in regard to what the minister of the day has planned for the Ashley Youth Detention Centre and the corrections facility. I note that there is money in the Budget for more upgrades at Risdon Prison. My understanding was that was going to cease and we were going to have these other correctional facilities, whatever they might look like, whether they are therapeutic, or a more open type of arrangement where you are not

necessarily in cells, but you might have a small unit and you go out during the day; you might undertake some work or something in the community, and then you head back at the at the end of the day, back into the confinement.

I am disappointed that, just by the stroke of a pen, that northern facility is no longer a priority for this government. That is something that disappoints me. I know there are some real issues about where and what community might embrace something like that, but if it were not a full-blown prison, perhaps there would be more of a receptive approach to embrace that type of facility in their communities. That might be being fairly optimistic, but I am a glass half-full person and I will always remain that way because there are certainly some good, impressive models around the country and around the world in regard to what a therapeutic facility might look like for those who have made some poor choices and ended up needing to be in a prison system.

One of the positive media releases that I read on Friday was from the Council of the Ageing (COTA) Tasmania for the older Australians where the government had committed to installing funding agreements for at least five years. That must have been music to the ears of that organisation. I am sure that every other organisation that provides important services across the state would really appreciate being able to have a longer arrangement with government for funding for the services that they carry out.

That can sometimes be a challenge because things change. In this case we have a really tight budget, but to know that you can keep some staff, you can employ somebody and you are not going back at every 12-month interval - I imagine that in some cases it is announced that you have the 12 months of funding, and in six months time you are already reapplying for funding for the next 12 months. Having that long-term arrangement is really positive. I encourage government and those who work with NGOs throughout the state to have a concerted look at what could be done in that space. We have heard many times about organisations that have come to members of parliament. We have had briefings from the likes of New Horizons and others who have potentially lost their funding and do not even know how they are going to pay their staff. The work that that particular organisation does is exceptional.

Under the NDIS arrangements - and we talked about this through the debate for the disability bill that passed the House last week - some of those organisations do not meet the very tight confines of what is required by the NDIS in the funding that they provide, even though the Tasmanian government provides an enormous amount of funding - our share of funding - to look after those people with disability that belong to us in our state. Rightly so, but we also need to be mindful that if the government of the day was handing out the funding, I am sure those organisations would be funded. When it goes off to a third person or a third party, they do not necessarily see the value of some of those organisations the same way we do, here on the ground. I congratulate the government on that. That is a really good initiative and it would be great to see it rolled out across the board.

I have already spoken about the efficiency dividend. I will not say too much more about that, only that it is going to cause some real challenges for all departments. I expect that will be, if not the first question as we open up each area through our Estimates scrutiny process next week, the second or third question. How is each department going to meet those efficiency dividends? Will they cut staff? Will they sell off assets? Will they cut services? I expect those people who are looking at that now are directing their mind to that, because they have some idea of the questions that will be asked. They are the really important, overarching questions

as we start off with each of those various ministers and their portfolio areas as we move through the scrutiny.

A number of people have also referred to Mr Saul Eslake and some of the comments he has provided. I personally thank those former members and the one remaining member of the Jacqui Lambie Network, who instigated Mr Eslake's undertaking of that work and had it available to us prior to the Budget. Some members will get an opportunity to speak to or listen directly to Mr Eslake in the morning when he comes into the parliament.

I note that the Treasurer provided the Budget papers under embargo to Mr Eslake prior to the Budget, which is fairly generous, given that I am sure the Treasurer had a pretty good idea of some of the concerns that would be raised. He would not have possibly known what was going to be suggested by Mr Eslake as a solution or a way to move forward. Mr Eslake has acknowledged in his assessment that he was grateful to receive those budget papers prior, and I thought that was a pretty bold move on the part of the Treasurer.

Yes, he owns the Budget. He takes responsibility for it and, through his budget speech to the parliament last week, he never faltered and never moved away from it. He suggested that the federal government needs to step up. I do not think there has been any time I have stood here and not thought that the federal government needs to step up. I would love to have a graph for Tasmania that looks like the Western Australian one - the non-financial public sector, cash deficit states and territories. Good old Western Australia, they are doing beautifully, thank you very much.

Ms O'Connor - Still they had a bleat and got more GST revenue, and shafted us.

Ms RATTRAY - Exactly.

Mrs Hiscutt - We need to bleat too.

Ms O'Connor - We need to, collectively. A collective bleat.

Ms RATTRAY - How on Earth did that happen? I do not understand that. We were supposed to be no worse off; we should never have agreed to 'no worse off'. We should have only ever agreed that we need to be better off, not no worse off. How did we do that?

That is a rhetorical question. I do not expect any one of my learned colleagues to be able to answer that, but it does beggar belief that that was agreed to. Mr Eslake made it very clear in his paper that the budget papers present a more sober outlook for Tasmania's economy than the one presented in February's Pre-Election Financial Outlook. Some time has passed now since February. Even though the Treasury acknowledges the slowdown in the growth rate of Tasmania's population in contrast to the experience elsewhere in Australia - I heard only couple of days ago on the radio that Queensland, the Sunshine State, is going gangbusters again with population growth. Everyone is heading north.

Ms O'Connor - It is a terrible place to live. It is hot.

Ms RATTRAY - From a Queenslander?

Ms O'Connor - From a Queenslander. A terrible place to live.

Mrs Hiscutt - Good for a holiday though.

Ms O'Connor - Yes, great for a holiday. Then we come back to paradise.

Ms RATTRAY - This is not holidaying people. This is people packing up and relocating and making their home. That is interesting in itself, particularly when we hear about some of the issues that are faced in other states. I know we are not alone when it comes to youth crime and some of those really challenging issues for communities. The biggest one for me is if you happened to find a snake in your house - there is no way I would live in Queensland for love or money. Just the thought of that would be enough for me but I know that other people have families, priorities and all manner of reasons why they might choose to relocate to another place.

Mr President, I also note that in Mr Eslake noted that Treasury notes the increasing cost to buy and rent a home in Tasmania, as elsewhere, but does not draw any connection between that and the resumption of the net migration to the mainland as the review did.

It is interesting that we want people to stay in our state. We want to help them get into a home of their own. I have been, from time to time, over the past few weeks, looking for a rental property for one of my family members in Launceston. It is nigh impossible to find something that would fit a single income person that you could say is reasonable, not only condition-wise, but rent-wise, for a young person to carry out a work commitment. It is so difficult. At this point in time, she is able to travel, but that is not always satisfactory and particularly in the height of a winter when it is pretty cold and horrible, even travelling the Lilydale-Golconda Road, certainly the Sideling highway never entertained her mind. It is still not an easy thing to do and then front up for work and be fresh and ready to go and be able to drive home at the end of the day. We will work through that.

Some people have nowhere to go, have no alternative and we find them sleeping under infrastructure in and around Launceston, and in caravan parks in the north-east. You can only stay for two weeks and then you have to leave, find somewhere to go for a couple of days and then come back.

In one particular case, the Salvation Army was kind enough to let somebody stay in their tent for a number of weeks, actually into months. That put pressure on people living around that vicinity who felt unsafe. It is a vicious cycle and a really difficult cycle. I do not have an answer. All I can say is that this House supported the establishment of Homes Tasmania in the hope and the anticipation that things would get better in supplying homes for those who want to live in Tasmania. At this point in time, I have seen nothing to give me that confidence - nothing. An odd house here or there, a small amount of housing, but certainly not to the level that we need to reduce the wait list of social housing to meet the needs of those people who need a home in our state.

I thank Mr Eslake for the work that he did. Just reading those enormous figures is quite confronting, and we will talk about that more as we go through the budget cycle.

I draw people's attention to the 15 pages of election commitments. If we did not have that enormous quantum of election commitments - and I know there has been some commentary about if the other party, and in this case obviously the Labor Party, had been successful, they would have had a similar list of election commitments. That does not make it right. Some of

those people, organisations and local government areas belong to me. It is getting very difficult to argue that they are not all worthy of the funding commitment that has been provided. Given that the government of the day would have known - or should have known - that there was going to be a significant financial pressure on the state's budget, whether it was handed down in June, July, August or September, why do you go around giving out money like confetti at a wedding?

I have a couple of questions and I will follow up at a later time regarding Clarence City Council - I am not picking on them, because they have 15 initiatives. When does the state government have to fund so much of local government that it looks like they are hardly able to manage themselves? Yes, there are a number of initiatives that have been put forward: a couple in Dorset, three on Flinders Island, one in Break O'Day, seven in Kingborough, and seven in the Huon Valley. There are some smaller amounts of money - some I think are re-announced - that is another story. If local government has decided they cannot manage to provide for the community with what they have, without coming to the state government and putting pressure on its budget, which is ultimately their budget, perhaps the community expectation needs to be pulled back.

As I said at the beginning of my contribution, you cannot have everything you want. It would be lovely, but we do not live in that world. We are not Elon Musk or whoever has the most money. We are not those people or organisations. We have to be mindful that it is not our money. It belongs to the people of Tasmania. I feel sure that, had they any idea that many of those promises and commitments made were going to put enormous added pressure on an already tight budget, they would not have such an expectation.

Most people understand that not everything is intergenerational. We understand how big infrastructure projects work, that they are intergenerational and do create a positive in our community. They certainly do in your own home budget. However, I do not see how, for some of them the government of the day should be asked or expected to be providing funds. I am not going to single out any one in particular, but there are myriad that I look at and wonder, why would you?

I have made the point that knowing this will have a significant negative impact on the budget. Would it not have been better to be upfront and say that we are looking for stable government but are not prepared to do it at any cost? Others may have a different opinion. I am always happy to hear.

Those were my thoughts on the 15 pages of infrastructure. Believe it or not, I did write a few words. I had better have a look at them, I know I tend to get off the script.

By the way, those 15 pages of budget commitments tallied approximately \$1.3 billion. I talked about efficiency dividends. To reinforce regarding efficiency dividends, cost savings across all agencies and departments will be expected. Given that wages are the largest expense, what does that look like? We will look at that next week in detail. I expect that all ministers and department heads and those who will be flying the papers across the committee room table will have that well and truly in their sights for us next week.

The minister for Parks, the honourable Nick Duigan, member for Windermere, talked about the value of parks. I note that there was \$1.5 million for a parks pass statewide system. I already thought there was a statewide parks pass system. Whether it is an upgrade or not, I am

not sure. It will be interesting for Committee A, which will have the opportunity to drill down a little on the need for that \$1.5 million for a statewide parks pass system. When you have a look on the website, you can buy your pass for any of the parks across the state. I am interested in what that looks like.

I have already talked about the schools. Even though there were 15 schools identified in the Budget for redevelopment, there are probably closer to 40 or 50 schools that are in just as much need, if not more, hence the question asked in Question Time regarding the criteria and the process for identifying who was of most need, and whether it went on numbers. I have a number of schools and some of their facilities are less than ideal. I say that with some restraint.

In regard to infrastructure, I acknowledge the upgrade of the Elphin Sports Centre, over three budgets, \$21.5 million, well needed in that facility. It is a huge facility and it caters for hundreds of those who attend sports. They come from all parts of the north, not just Launceston and its surrounding areas, right out from the regions. That is certainly where I like to see some money put into the Elphin Sports Centre - long overdue. I acknowledge the minister and the Minister for Disability Services as well, who, I expect, has been instrumental in progressing that, at my request, from one of my constituents who lives at Longford and lives with disability. Going to see his daughter play basketball has been less than ideal for a number of years now and hopefully this upgrade will deliver reasonable access for everyone across our community.

I could not sit down without talking about the road maintenance contract. I know that we will have more time to talk about that next week, but the road maintenance contract, as I can read it, is worth around \$116 million to \$117 million. I am not sure where they are spending that road maintenance contract money, but it is not addressing the issues. I, or my office, should not have to make contact almost on a weekly basis, just giving them the heads up of where there needs to be some maintenance undertaken, certainly when it comes to removing some of those wattles that are fairly close to the road. Of course, when you have a big weather event, which we have had more recently, where do you think they are? They are all over the road. We should not wait for that. That should be as a matter of course. Every year they should go through the whole network and identify that if we have a heavy event, that one will be going over. You only have to look as you are driving past to see that they look quite unstable in the ground. Probably on your last trip to Pyengana, Mr President, when you went through Weldborough and down from the Little Plain, you would have looked and you would have thought this is going to be a nightmare if we have a big weather event. Well, guess what, it was.

I continue to be amazed that they know what the issues are, these are experts. They are experts.

Quorum formed.

Ms RATTRAY - Mr President, it is always nice to have some more people in the Chamber to listen.

What I was relaying to the House and to you, Mr President, was my concern at the lack of road maintenance. It is a serious issue. The longer the department leaves the contract in place and does not have the appropriate outcomes, the more it is going to cost in the long run. We all know if you do a little bit of maintenance all the time -

Mr PRESIDENT - As did the DMR did years ago.

Ms RATTRAY - As the DMR did many years ago. You would see someone on the shovel all the time. Now, I do not know if these contractors even own a shovel. I say that with the greatest respect because no-one ever seems to be using them and I see a fair few of them. To clean the road verges now they have a little digger that they sit on. Not only does it inconvenience those on the road, but it certainly causes some issues around safety on narrow sections.

But they do not do the job. They are not the same as someone physically getting out there and making sure that those road verges are clear of debris, have a decent water run-off area for them, and the like. I am no engineer, but I spend a lot of time on the road. I really hope that the department takes a strong look. I have seen the contract because I have been complaining or making comment for a very long time. I have seen the road maintenance contract and it is an extensive document. I am not sure that the people who are supposedly implementing that road maintenance contract are reading it and understanding it as well as they should. For the Premier to have to be on television on Sunday night because he has been out filling in potholes says it all for a start. I know it is the new program and I do not know whether that is on the back of the member for Murchison on adjournment last Thursday night, making a point that there are potholes. If he wants to come round the McIntyre electorate, he would not have enough days to fill in the potholes.

That in itself is a really strong message to those who are undertaking the work on our important road infrastructure across this state, if you have to be out filling up potholes when a piece of road has not officially even been opened, which is the case. I cite the northern stretch of road from the Stonor turn-off as I drove down yesterday morning and there was an enormous big chunk being cut out yesterday - 10 or 20 metres - I am not very good with lengths. It is a fair bit and quite deep. That stretch of road has only just been completed.

Mr PRESIDENT - At Stonor?

Ms RATTRAY - Yes, where the Stonor turn-off is, just north of that on that sweeping corner before you start on the overtaking lane. It beggars belief how we could pay top dollar and have that type of work undertaken. That was not road maintenance; that was a new piece of road infrastructure.

I think I have said enough. Most people have got the message. I am not confident that the state is in a good financial position, sadly, because nobody wants to see that.

I will finish on the same point that I feel like I make every year, other than the road infrastructure and the maintenance. We would have so much more to offer as members - others will speak for themselves - if we did this after we had the Estimates process, where you get all that information. Perhaps that is why we do not have it that way: it might take forever to talk about it. We get masses of really good information; departments, ministers and the like put a lot of work into the Estimates process and yes, it is available on *Hansard*. I am not sure who reads it, but we do not get an opportunity to put very much of that back into the process because if the questions have been answered, the line item does not remain open and that is it. You cannot take the Floor and make any points around that.

Again, I would respectfully request that there be an audit or a review of how this process is undertaken, particularly to be able to provide some more detailed information. There may be some very good reasons why something is as it is presented to members in the budget, but we do not get an opportunity to do that until next week, and then do we put it back on the record? Possibly not, but I always appreciate the opportunity to note the budget and this one in particular, as challenging as it is.

[5.23 p.m.]

Ms LOVELL (Rumney) - Mr President, I rise to give my reply to the budget. Every year at this time, and by this time I mean budget time, noting that this year it is some months later than we would normally undertake this process, I watch and listen to all the activity around the budget with some fascination.

There is the process of budget submissions, hours of work from hundreds of organisations, community groups, government departments and service providers around the state, outlining their priorities, their wants and their needs in terms of government funding. There are weeks of anticipation leading up to budget day. Those same organisations, community groups, government departments and service providers, alongside parliamentarians and others speculating about what might be included and what might be missed out.

There are at least a couple of weeks of every question being met with, 'The budget is being handed down on x date'. In other words, wait and see - frustrating to say the least and then it is budget day.

The Treasurer hands down the budget with a speech about all the ways this budget is good for the state. The highlights package, if you will, defending their record, pointing to spending commitments, whether we have heard them a thousand times already or not, explaining how this budget will deliver their plan. A flurry of activity in the days following with the responses from some of those organisations, community groups and service providers. What does this budget mean for them?

Some of the people they engage with will be celebrating. Many of them will not respond - just heads down, keep plugging away, trying to cobble together their own budget, finding ways to stretch a little further and cut a little more. The opposition will respond, so too the Greens; we all get a chance to put our thoughts on record.

Then there is Estimates, four long days of questions and answers, sometimes. Data comparisons, dollars here, cents there, policy explanations, attacks and defences. Some of it gets reported by the media, a lot more does not - and that is no criticism. There are only so many column inches or minutes in a half-hour bulletin.

We report back to parliament and then it is all over. After all this fluster and commotion, we all get on with it.

Every year, I wonder what our constituents make of all this and what it means to them. Do they understand the meaning of net operating deficit and how it differs from net debt? Do they understand what a minister is saying when they say they are investing more but at the same time finding efficiency dividends? What exactly is a frontline job? I am not even sure the government knows the answer to that. I am sure there are people who do understand all of this, but I wonder this because I can tell you now I did not understand any of that before I was

elected to this place. Some of it, I am happy to admit, I still do not. Every year I learn more and more. I know I have a long way to go before I can analyse the budget papers like the member for Murchison, for example.

I wonder what my constituents would make of all of this. I think they really just want to know how this budget will impact their everyday lives. How will the decisions being made by this government make their lives better? Will they be able to access health care more easily? Will an ambulance be more likely to turn up more quickly if they need one? Will their kids have all the support they need to thrive at school? Is the government doing what they said they would do when they were asking people to vote for them?

Most of the people I represent will never look at the budget papers. They rely on us to do that for them to answer these questions. It is pretty disappointing to have to say that with this budget, my constituents will not be able to access health care more easily. They will continue to wait unacceptably long times for surgery they might need. They will wait hours upon hours at overstretched emergency departments. They will keep having to gamble on whether or not an ambulance will turn up not just quickly but at all, because under this budget, the government is planning to spend \$130 million less on health employee costs, and that is the equivalent to 1000 nursing jobs. This budget shows \$600 million ripped from the Health budget over the next four years, and the Health department needs to find \$202.3 million in efficiency dividends, savings or cuts because there are no savings to be made in our health system.

Will their kids have the support they need to thrive at school? No. The Australian Education Union (AEU) has responded to the budget. Members may have seen or heard their comments, but I will quote from those comments now:

Tasmania's educators have slammed the 2024-25 state Budget's gross failure to act on the crisis facing our schools, colleges and TAFE campuses.

I will not quote word for word, but I will quote some passages from this:

After enduring a decade of inequity and neglect, educators are now being faced with further cuts. Educators have been left in the dark about how 'efficiency dividends' will be applied, or where. This couldn't come at a worse time, with educator morale at an all-time low.

This Budget fails to address educators' concerns. Nothing to address rising violence in classrooms, no investment in TAFE, no plan to fix the staffing crisis crushing our classrooms, or to implement the recommendations of the Education Review.

The ongoing staffing crisis has led to cut classes, crowded classrooms and unsafe workloads pushing educators past the breaking point. Psychological injury claims have increased 32% for teaching staff and 40% for other educators across DECYP.

This is a shocking indictment on a Government failing in its duty of care to students, educators and families, with no plan for change.

They go on to say:

Four years ago, 1 in 8 teachers planned to leave the profession before retirement. Today, it's 1 in 3. Tasmania's educators can't afford another decade of inequity and neglect.

...

This is an ideologically-driven budget from an out-of-control Treasurer.

No, their children will not have the support they need to thrive in schools. The Education department will need to find \$121.5 million in efficiency dividends or cuts. While the minister has committed to no cuts in schools, any teacher or staff member in any school will tell you that a cut in the department will absolutely impact on what happens in schools.

So, is the government doing what they said they would do when they were asking people to vote for them? Let us see. On 6 March this year, the Premier stood in Launceston with a well-known community advocate with lived experience, promising that his government would build a new Northern Heart Centre. He said:

Heart disease is more prevalent in Tasmania than anywhere in Australia, and it is our state's biggest single cause of death.

In fact, north-west Tasmania has the highest incidence of cardiovascular disease in the country, and chest pain is one of the most common reasons for admission at the LGH, NWRH and the Mersey.

But it is the people behind each statistic that my government is concerned by, and that's why we are going to build a new Northern Heart Centre.

This will be a life-saving addition to the Launceston General Hospital, for northern and north-west Tasmanians especially.

This Heart Centre will deliver more expert cardiology services from diagnostics, to procedures to extra ward beds - giving patients and families the very best care possible.

We have a 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's Future and will continue to invest in the capital works Tasmania's health system needs.

The Premier told us this was going to cost \$120 million over five years.

Where is that \$120 million over five years? It is nowhere to be found in this Budget. It seems that this promise has changed, with the Northern Heart Centre now included in a list of projects that will only go ahead if the federal government pays half. No funding has been allocated. There is no money for this project, but that is not what the government said when they made this promise to Tasmanians - when they were asking people to elect them. It is just one of a long list of broken promises from this government, not only at this last election, but over several.

We are still waiting for a new Tamar Bridge; an underground bus mall in Hobart; light rail to the northern suburbs by 2023; a fifth lane on the Southern Outlet; new *Spirits* by 2021,

not to mention somewhere to put them; Tasmania being the healthiest state in the nation by 2025; a Hydrogen Action Plan; a replacement for Ashley; the Royal's new emergency department; and a \$580-million redevelopment of the LGH. The list goes on.

This government has a track record of not doing what it promises, but the most frightening thing about this Budget is the financial position it leaves Tasmania in. Our net debt will reach \$5.4 billion this financial year and \$8.5 billion in 2027. That is around \$35,000 of debt for every Tasmanian household. The cost of repaying that debt will be \$1.4 billion over the next four years, more than the government will spend on hospital emergency departments and ambulances combined.

The state pays interest on its debts, like all of us. The bigger the debt, the bigger the interest. The more the government borrows, the more it costs them to pay that back. Just like a household budget, money that is going to paying back debts cannot be spent on other things. The more debt we have to repay, the bigger the interest, the higher the costs and the less there is to spend on other things.

In a household budget, that might be a holiday, new clothes or treats in the groceries, if you are lucky. In a state budget, that means services or infrastructure projects - services that our communities rely on and projects the government has promised that are important to our community and our economy.

There is no good news in this budget. There are some commitments to some worthy projects, but in terms of the bigger picture there is a whole lot of debt with nothing to show for it.

Now we have Estimates, our opportunity to unpack the Budget and its implications. I have no doubt that, like every year, we will hear plenty of spin, some Fergonomics and a whole lot of words to avoid saying anything. It would be so refreshing to see a different approach - one of honesty, transparency and a desire to be upfront with the people who believed those promises we now see broken - but I will not be holding my breath. I will do the best I can to interrogate this Budget and the decisions being made by the government, because those decisions impact my community every day.

I am worried about the impact of this Budget on my community now and for generations to come.

I note the Budget.

[5.36 p.m.]

Mr VINCENT (Prosser) - Madam Acting President, I am going to have to practise that. I have been sitting there practising saying, 'Mr President'.

Madam ACTING PRESIDENT - It has a nice ring to it.

Mr VINCENT - I am glad you like it.

I am pleased to be making a contribution to the 2024-25 Budget, my first as a Legislative Councillor.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr VINCENT - Having listened to everybody's contribution today, I need to give a preamble. I am a member of the government, which is something I am very proud of. I am also a businessman and have been since a young age, in my parents' business and most of the way through my life. I am a father, grandfather and community leader, although I have swapped hats now. I am also a community member who is involved in many groups. I appreciate what everybody has said today and their contributions to the debate. I assure all members in this place that I take all their comments on board.

My budget response today is relatively short, but I can assure you of my commitment to my position as an MLC and member of the government to focus on making Tasmania safer, healthier, stronger and sustainable into the future. I wanted to add those comments to what I had prepared to read because I have taken on board a lot of comments today. There are all those things I mentioned as part of my life, so you look at different parts of the budget in different proportions and understandings. I felt I needed that preamble.

In my inaugural speech, I mentioned that I watched the Tasmanian parliament with interest for over 40 years and have always found that the state Budget is one of the most exciting parts to focus on. Most in our communities have an opinion. Most want more money. Most do not understand the complexities of funding the day-to-day activities of our beautiful state, and that is okay. We do not all need to be experts, as the member for Rumney touched on a few minutes ago.

Handing down the state budget is one of the most important things the government does each year. Although I am relatively new to this place, I look forward to having an increasing role and involvement regardless of the hard decisions that have to be made with future budgets. Passing a budget means nurses continue to get paid, police stay on the beat, roads get fixed - most of the time - and essential services are provided.

I consider it a privilege to be a participant in this process as an elected member of the Legislative Council. This Budget drives the delivery of our 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's Future. Under Premier Jeremy Rockliff, the Liberals committed to tackling issues that matter to Tasmanians and to making life more affordable. The Premier's acknowledgement of the economic headwinds we are now facing increases the focus and need for a strong budget.

This Budget delivers on the commitments made. It secures record investment in cost of living relief, health, housing and education.

Many years ago, before my life in local government, I always believed there were two sides to every argument - the right and the wrong side. When I became mayor I soon realised I potentially had 16,500 Sorell residents, each with their own opinions and interests -

Ms O'Connor - And all of them right?

Mr VINCENT - All of them right, yes.

Now, as a member of the Rockliff government, I can multiply that figure out to well over 500,000 opinions, each with their own passion, vision and belief that their opinion is the only one which matters. To be an effective leader or government, I believe you need to show the

ability to weigh up all those opinions and still make decisions which will benefit the best interests of the community in the immediate, medium and long-term future. That is what we are trying to do.

I have always found it interesting that despite the economic difficulties we face either as a nation, state or local community in any given year, I cannot recall ever meeting someone willing to forgo their funding requests or needs. Demand always outstrips supply. This creates a very awkward environment to manage the state's finances, but highlights the never-ending need to keep all parts of our economy buoyant.

With that said, the government is creating more jobs and investment opportunities to make Tasmania the best place to live, work and raise a family. Initiatives in this Budget ease hip pocket pressures that we know many Tasmanians are facing, and this includes energy bill relief payments, half-price bus fares, healthy lunches at schools - which my granddaughters absolutely love - as well as stamping out stamp duty for thousands of Tasmanians.

The Budget prioritises funding to build a better health system, make housing more accessible and affordable, and keep Tasmanians safe. It builds on the success of our strong infrastructure agenda with a further \$5.1 billion to be invested into job-creating projects that will deliver new hospitals, schools, very important training facilities, roads and bridges.

My electorate of Prosser is supported by this Budget with more money for vital projects like transforming the Tasman Highway between Hobart and Sorell into a consistent four-lane connection. We have already seen mammoth private enterprise investment flow from that connection.

I visited the new Brighton High School on Monday and was impressed with the amazing scope and layout of this new build and how it encompasses the entire community - a truly fantastic facility with students, teachers and families very proud of what they are about to receive. To see the three children whom we took through the school with us - and the only way I can describe it is like they were on raspberry cordial, running around and were just amazed. Some of the technology and points built into that school is incredible.

The Sorell School rebuild is moving steadily towards completion, with continuous growth in student numbers.

I am especially pleased with the upgrade to the Dodges Ferry Primary School as part of our School Building Blitz program. As mayor, I had worked with the community for over nine years on seeing this project come to fruition. This amazing school is the backbone of the Southern Beaches community and this major upgrade is essential for the growth of that community.

Delivering new infrastructure at the Port Arthur Historic Site will continue to increase the authority's ability to attract vital tourism to the peninsula.

Completion of the Midland Highway Action Plan continues to improve this major freight link.

Establishing Tasmania's first shearing and wool handling innovation centre at Campbell Town will be fantastic for that region and the farming community. There can be no better or more suitable place in the state for that centre.

Funding the Royal Flying Doctor Service to continue delivery of oral health services to concessional card holders and children across the east coast is important and vital.

There is support for our tourism sector with the new visitor gateway at Freycinet National Park and Maria Island Rediscovered project, and support for various sporting clubs and community facilities. These clubs and organisations are the heart and soul of all our communities. Their efforts drive essential activities and services throughout our regions which we cannot live without.

The Budget includes measures to improve access to essential services such as primary health care, early childhood and educational care, and affordable housing. Tasmania has come a long way, but there is much more work to be done. We must keep Tasmania moving forward and continue to grow our economy so that we can deliver the infrastructure and services Tasmania needs and deserves. Strong cross-generational infrastructure projects lead to strong private investment, creating stronger and healthy communities.

I acknowledge the challenges and I am only too willing, as I said before, to work towards solutions to all those issues.

Madam Deputy President, I support the Budget.

[5.46 p.m.]

Mr EDMUNDS (Pembroke) - Madam Deputy President, I also will address the Budget and I thank other members for their comments, including the previous speaker, the member for Prosser. I wrote my speech while I was listening to addresses from both Houses, depending on who was up. Perhaps some colleagues might have influenced what I wrote. I probably should have been listening to the dulcet tones of the member for Prosser.

We have a responsibility to ensure that we do not leave debt legacies for future generations because we are too selfish to tighten our belts. Maintaining our lifestyle today at the expense of the next generation is intergenerational theft and selfishness writ large. The current debt levels all over the country are distressing and need to be addressed. This will require tough decisions for the genuine welfare of the next generations. Debt to pay for our regular expenditure is both unsustainable and ultimately immoral.

Given tight budgets will be a thing of the future, all government priorities will need to be set based on genuine necessity. As part of the task, we will also need to encourage hard work and provide reward for effort while backing in the productive job-creating sectors of our economy. Not my words, but those from the inaugural speech of the manager of government business in the other place, the Honourable Mr Abetz. It is something we can all reflect on.

In light of last week's perhaps meekly delivered budget, I too have a few hot takes. We have delivered the worst set of debt and deficit figures in Tasmanian history. I am not convinced there is a plan to fix it. The government will provide less money to agencies for key services such as health and police, fire and emergency management and refuses to say where the cuts will come from. The Budget itself forecasts 700 jobs to be lost in the economy. It will

take many years of strong and disciplined financial management to return Tasmania's finances to good health.

Last year, the Rockliff government delivered the largest deficit in Tasmanian history at \$1.5 billion. This Budget delivers a combined \$1.7 billion of operating deficits over the next four years. The concern is that the government cannot pay for its day-to-day operating expenses without using the credit card. Unfortunately, the government has never delivered an underlying surplus budget for its entire period of government and does not have a plan to deliver one in the future. The expenditure numbers are not credible. The claim is that total government spending will be \$350 million, \$300 million less than last year. That cannot be achieved without slashing services. Net debt will reach \$8.5 billion in 2027, around \$35,000 for every Tasmanian household. In the next four years the government will spend \$1.4 billion just to service the debt. This is more than they spend on hospital emergency departments and ambulances combined.

Treasury says that Tasmania's employment will shrink in 2024-25 by 0.25 per cent, which is the equivalent of 700 jobs. Expectations for economic growth have been slashed by almost half, with gross state product only expected to grow 1.25 per cent in 2024-25.

The budget papers paint a bleak warning that things could get worse that 'Tasmania's population could stagnate, or decline, in the short- to medium-term, possibly driven by continued negative net interstate migration' and that this 'could lead to reduced economic activity in the State and exacerbate challenges around workforce shortages and an ageing populations'.

Despite claims to the contrary, there will be cuts to frontline services. In 2024-25, the budget papers show \$130 million less spending on health employee costs. That is the equivalent of 1000 nursing jobs. It also shows \$12 million less spending on employee costs for police, fire and emergency management, effectively wiping out the benefit of a promise to recruit 60 new police.

No agency will be spared from the pain, with an increased efficiency dividend of \$450 million to deliver cuts to agencies, including Health - \$202.3 million; Education - \$121.5 million, Justice - \$25.8 million; NRE - \$15.3 million; Police, Fire and Emergency Management - \$35.1 million; DPAC - \$8.7 million; State Growth - \$23.1 million; and Tourism Tasmania - \$3.6 million. Infrastructure funding is actually set to decline by 30 per cent by 2027.

I have been tuned to budget replies in both Houses and one of the phrases I have kept hearing is 'pathway to surplus'. It is nice language, but it is not the case. There is no pathway to surplus. This morning, the Premier could not even say when the debt will hit its highest point. Indeed, Saul Eslake said on 12 September it is now clear that Tasmania's public finances are on track to be the worst of any state or territory. I heard some blaming of Canberra, and it is funny that we have only started to hear that in the last couple of years. Whenever skyrocketing power prices have been brought up, the suggestion was to write to Dr Chalmers about petrol prices, yet petrol prices are down 50 cents per litre since I last heard that argument put.

Mr Duigan - Power prices are down in real terms.

Mr EDMUNDS - I did not make any comment on that. I am just making the point that it is easy to throw rocks at Canberra, but I think there will also be a lot of eye-rolling in local government about some of that rhetoric about handballing responsibility. As we saw in the local government review - whatever you thought of it - there was a clear acknowledgement that local government was also a sector that was carrying and paying for services that were not necessarily its responsibility. Granted, some of that was federal responsibility as well.

I will save a lot of my critiques on portfolio areas and my electorate until after Estimates in one way, shape or form. I do not see a lot of point giving too much of a heads up on what is to come next week. I note that while the Treasurer was handing out flowers to his ministerial colleagues for all kinds of issues and projects last Thursday, there was conspicuously no mention of the AFL team or stadium and, perhaps more concerning, no mention of the High Performance Centre. As members would be aware, I have asked about this project in this place with questions without notice, and sought answers through other means such as downstairs and in the media. We are really getting nowhere. I think many observers believe that this project is off to Kingston. What I do not understand is the lack of willingness to communicate and own the narrative, should that be the case.

There are many people on the eastern shore who expect that the High Performance Centre will be built on the old Rosny golf course. I hope the council has not wasted significant time and money on what might end up being a fool's errand. Every piece of information on the High Performance Centre has had to be dragged out, and that will continue next week, no doubt. This morning the mayor of Clarence City Council spoke on Triple M *Breakfast with Kaz & Tubes*, and this is what he said, as reported by Pulse News with regards to the high performance centre:

It has been just so frustrating and in my view, it really has been the most unprofessional process I have ever seen. There has been no proper structure. It's been incredibly poorly handled by senior bureaucrats within the Department of State Growth and the minister, and it's just diabolical where we are at the moment. The DA should have been lodged by now. The construction should have started. If we are serious about having this facility up by 2026, I think that now is a very challenging time frame to meet.

... We had no contact, no conversations or ability to negotiate with senior staff within the Department of State Growth in recent months, and at no point in time has Kingborough been mentioned as the preferred site.

... As I understand it, there are challenges with both sites and the geotechnical information I've not been privy to.

The mayor, Mr Blomeley, said that the government had continually told the council that Rosny was the only site that meets the AFL's requirements of being close to a population centre and transport corridors. The mayor went on:

If those criteria are now negotiable, other sites within the Clarence municipality which were dismissed by the state and AFL representatives could have been further explored.

... From my perspective, the division in the community has been caused by a severe lack of information coming out of the government and frankly, it has been horrible to see.

What a mess, and it is not as though the mess is confined to the eastern shore. The *Spirits* debacle has been emblematic of the failings and failures we have seen over the past decade. How on earth could we be so far behind on these ships and yet still not have somewhere for them to dock? It is a deep shame and it is costing our economy millions of dollars every year. It is smashing our tourism and hospitality businesses among others, and the uncertainty is not showing any signs of abating.

It has echoes of the non-delivery that has unfortunately been the trademark of the past decade, some of which is confirmed in this Budget: no bridge over the Tamar; and no underground bus mall. Where is the Mornington roundabout? How long does it take to deliver ferry services when you have the federal money in the kicker? Why is there no money for the Northern Heart Centre or the emergency department of the Royal? My colleague, the member for Rumney, had a longer list than me. The light rail that was supposed to be delivered by 2023; the Southern Outlet.

I had a school group in from Rosny College today at lunchtime, and I believe another group is coming in at 11.00 a.m. tomorrow. It is a challenge for all of us how we make our jobs relevant to our communities and particularly to youth, but what is more important than our future legacy around how we manage the budget and the services that will be delivered for those people after we have come and gone? Those future generations will be saddled with \$8.6 billion of debt - and let us not forget that the government came to power with cash in the bank. That is a tragedy for future generations unless something is done.

Our finances are the worst in the country. In the past decade, spending has increased substantially, but service delivery outcomes in health care, educational achievement and housing have declined.

Today, in his Budget reply speech, the Labor leader, Dean Winter, announced Labor's first steps towards getting public finances back on track. These are 10 things to do from day one to get the budget back on track:

- (1) Bring more consulting services in-house, as the federal government has done successfully.
- (2) Conduct an audit of all outsourcing contracts to ensure taxpayers are getting value for money, and not hesitate to renegotiate or terminate contracts that are not delivering cost savings, high-quality outcomes or which could be delivered better in-house.
- (3) Ban pork-barrelling and rorts to stop taxpayers being ripped off. Look to pass a law that will make all government grants go through a rigorous assessment process.
- (4) Stamp out dodgy deals and the improper use of public money by enhancing the powers and independence of the Tasmanian Audit Office.

Our auditors have the weakest powers of any similar agency in the country, and we believe that needs to change.

- (5) Ensure decisions are taken with a long-term view of the state's finances by including 10-year projections for debt and deficits in every budget, as was recommended by Saul Eslake.
- (6) Improve financial transparency and the policy development capacity of the entire parliament by establishing a parliamentary budget service. We will negotiate a deal to enable a Treasury officer to be based within the federal PBO to help reduce the cost.
- (7) To establish a review and evaluation unit in Treasury so failed programs and policies can be identified quickly and ended.
- (8) Examine opportunities for specialised delivery of services.
- (9) Explore having the generic IT infrastructure of various government departments put together to manage maintenance costs, strengthen buying power and provide improvements in cybersecurity.
- (10) Introduce performance-based budgeting that links government spending to measurable outcomes.

The point he made is that every dollar saved with this policy would go directly towards debt reduction. Obviously there is an acknowledgement that those measures on their own are not going to fix the budget overnight. The hole that has been dug is so deep it is not credible to suggest that is possible in the short term. Digging ourselves out will take years of discipline and hard work, but there has to be an acknowledgement. To solve a problem, you have to acknowledge that you have a problem. Just like a household will deal with its debt, you cannot click your fingers and solve it overnight, but you have to change your behaviours and look at strategies to try to get yourself under control.

Yes, there is an acknowledgement that much more will have to be done; he has acknowledged that we are willing to do it and what is required to get Tasmania out of the financial mess that we have been put in. For those who did not see it, it is probably worth having a watch or checking out *Hansard*. It was focused on jobs and economic development, being pro-business, pro-worker, pro-development and taking responsibility for financial management in Tasmanian politics.

There were some other policies announced: backing development by giving the Coordinator-General new powers to get things done; facilitating a renewable energy boom by getting Marinus built, by allowing the federal government to take control, unlocking \$25 billion of renewable energy development; and the measures I just talked about, fixing the budget to bring our finances back under control. These come on top of commitments around backing a stadium, the university's plans for a \$500 million science facility, 2000 new homes and a commitment to the industries that regional Tasmanians in particular rely on.

After 10 years, Tasmania's finances are now officially the worst in the nation. The interest bill on the government's debt could pay for the ambulance service twice over and economists are openly speculating about credit rating downgrades and a potential financial crisis.

I remind you again of this inherited zero net debt in 2014, but now the hole we are in will take years to undo. A sensible step is to bring pork-barrelling to an end. The Budget lists 480 election commitments that total nearly \$1.3 billion. As the leader has said, individually, nearly all of them have some merit, but collectively, in the context of a budget disaster, they highlight just how irresponsible we have become with the finances. Enough is enough. It is time to ban pork-barrelling and rorts. We will look to pass a law to recognise all government grants to go through an impartial assessment process. We cannot allow debt to continue to be racked up for political purposes and will put an end to the ugly spectacle of government MPs being investigated by the Integrity Commission for making grants that directly benefit themselves or their family.

I know this announcement has been derided by the Premier and some others, and more than one of his former staff who now have their own pulpit. To me, that indicates how ingrained the pork-barrelling has become in election strategising. How could we possibly run an election campaign without pork-barrelling? You can still advocate for your community without creating a slush fund; indeed, most members of this place have been able to win the support of their community without promising a single specific piece of pork. Central to all of this, you still need a fair assessment process at the end.

Our finances are in a shambles and we have record debt, no pathway to surplus, and no real acknowledgement that work needs to be done to fix it, despite the comments of Mr Abetz. Being future-focused, eliminating unfair pork-barrelling and the arms race that elections create, especially when early ones are stacked upon each other, and the 10-point plan to methodically pay down the debt, and to stimulate the economy to generate income to pay down the debt more and fund our essential services, seems like a pretty good step to me, especially without a credible alternative to get our finances back on track, presented by the Treasurer.

I will conclude by backing the comments made by the member for McIntyre: is this the best? Do we have the cart before the horse when we are making these comments before we have even been able to do Estimates?

With that said, Mr President, we will support passing the Budget with the warning that continuing to do nothing could lead to a point where the parliament, either this House or the other, will get fed up with a lack of action and a lack of forward vision. We have another budget in only a matter of months next year. I also look forward to the Estimates process.

[6.04 p.m.]

Mr HARRISS (Huon) - Mr President, I start by noting that I am still coming to terms with the whole budget being announced on the Thursday and then we are here on Tuesday trying to decipher and read the numbers on it. Coming from a building background where we can see the plans come through and go through council and then we get to a stage, it puts me under some stress sometimes and the kids probably do not deserve all the yelling.

If I had to sum up the budget in one word, it would have to be 'disappointing'. I might start, though, by noting that there are some positive aspects. The focus on cost-of-living relief is a big plus, as is the additional funding for health and education initiatives, but the offsetting

efficiency dividends mean that it is a decidedly mixed bag with the prospect of real budget pain if we are to meet targets for spending restraint in the out-years.

Overall, at a time, we have been assisted by the Eslake report to understand that we face an extremely difficult financial outlook. The budget does not appear to have fixed any of the problems. If anything, it has added to them. The Eslake report, which many have cited already, has crystallised concerns that we have been living beyond our means. Every family and every business understands where that leads and there is nothing about it that is good. But instead of addressing the problems, the budget adds to them - another round of spending more than we earn, more deficits, more debt, and any realistic action to get things back on track put off until somewhere over the horizon.

What that means is \$8.6 billion of state debt looming within the forward Estimates, together with another \$16 billion of government-guaranteed debt held by GBEs, according to Mr Eslake. More and more of our revenues hived off to pay interest bills, a rising risk of credit rating downgrades, and less and less of the money we do have available to fund essential services like health, housing, education, police and child protection, and in real terms, continuing to run cash deficits with no prospect of paying down any of the debt burden. It is not a pretty picture. Treasury, in its Pre-Election Financial Outlook Report, advised that in just four years we have gone from having money in the bank to being billions of dollars in the red. The deterioration has been alarming.

Mr Eslake nailed the reason. In soccer terms, it is 'an own goal'. Government spending decisions have outstripped revenues and it appears to be ongoing. According to Mr Eslake, the problem started back in 2017. Over six consecutive budgets, spending decisions totalled more than \$5.7 billion, while revenue decisions came to just \$265 million.

Along the way, government has reportedly rolled out a lavish list of election promises at three successive state elections. Treasury has advised that the cost of implementing the 2018 and 2021 election commitments was \$1.4 billion each time. The Treasurer has revealed that the cost of the 24 Liberal election promises will be even more at \$1.67 billion. That is almost \$4.5 billion in Liberal Party election promises in just six years.

Ms Rattray - Stop having elections.

Mr HARRISS - Yes. Two of those were early, were they not?

The budget reveals that the money is simply not there to pay for this spending spree, so it goes on the public credit card.

Mr Eslake also pointed out that these unfunded election commitments have been a big factor in turning the Tasmanian budget into what he regards by some measures as the biggest basket case of any state or territory.

The options were outlined and none of them was very palatable: raise taxes, sell assets or cut spending. The government has ruled out new or increased taxes and significant asset sales. It has imposed some spending restraints, but nowhere near enough to balance the books, so things can only get worse before they get better.

The record does not inspire confidence. After foreshadowing a \$300 million efficiency dividend last year, the Premier and Treasurer have presided over a \$1.2 billion budget black hole that did not stop the Liberal Party running up almost \$1.3 billion in new election promises.

The additional \$150 million worth of efficiencies announced in this year's budget do not kick in until the last year of the forward Estimates. In the meantime, the budget papers advised that more than \$3 of new funding has been committed to offset every dollar of efficiencies. Now, I, by no means, am a financial expert, but that does not appear to be a credible plan to fix the problem.

In case members might think that the critics are being overly harsh about this budget, I might refer you to some commentary from within the Liberal Party itself. Nick Cater is a senior fellow and former long-serving executive director of the Menzies Research Centre, which is, as some would know, the Liberal Party's national think tank. He was discussing the pre-election budget brought down by the Queensland Labor government and he said:

This year's Queensland state budget allocated \$3.7 bn for pre-election sweeteners, roughly \$1000 per registered voter.

The budget ... is arguably the most reckless and irresponsible pre-election fiscal splurge in Australian political history.

... To add insult to injury, Miles -

the Queensland Premier

has paid for these cheap, tawdry bribes with other people's money. The bill will be added to the state's debt ...

That was the view of pre-election government spending in Queensland from one of the most influential Liberal Party figures in the country.

So, you might ask, how does Tasmania stack up on the Cater chart? Incredibly, if you use the same dollars per-registered voter benchmark, Queensland has 3.66 million registered voters and Tasmania has 407,000. The \$1.3 billion of Liberal Party election promises funded in the Tasmanian budget is more than three times the size of the Queensland spend-athon.

That is on top of a record \$1.5 billion deficit after a \$1.2 billion budget blowout in the 2023-24 financial year and, once again, is based on free application of the public credit card and adding once more to the growing mountain of state debt.

That brings us to what we should do about it. We have a minority government seeking approval for a budget containing funding for \$1.3 billion of Liberal Party election commitments, which we have been told by Mr Eslake is a big part of creating the black hole between budget spending and capacity to pay.

Ms Forrest - A few pork chops probably?

Mr HARRISS - Yes, that is right. It was, to use Mr Cater's words, reckless and irresponsible of the Liberal Party, which would have known it was facing a massive budget deficit to promote almost \$1.3 billion of new spending in the state election campaign.

Ms Rattray - Did I not say that? And I am no think tank.

Mr HARRISS - You did, maybe you are a think tank.

Ms Lovell - Yes, don't sell yourself short.

Mr HARRISS - That is right, I was just confirming what you were saying. My view is that this could and should have been avoided, by a more principled approach to electioneering by the major parties. But clearly that is not going to happen without some clear-cut rules being adopted by the parliament.

In the meantime, as I see it, it is a bit late now to revisit the campaign promises that have brought us to this point. We do, however, need strong action by the parliament to ensure we put an end to the industrial-scale pork-barrelling which has brought us to this point and to give the Integrity Commission more power to drive the highest standards that are clearly needed to protect the electoral processes, which is the foundation of our parliamentary democracy.

Ms Forrest - At least this spending is in the budget, not coming out of the Treasurer's Reserve, as happened the last time.

Ms O'Connor - And tried to hide it.

Ms Forrest - That is the Treasurer's Reserve, yes.

Mr HARRISS - It is the same pot, is it not, essentially?

Ms Forrest - No, but if we get to scrutinise this in the front end as opposed to after the event.

Mrs Hiscutt - Time is ticking.

Mr HARRISS - Do you want me to speak faster? Members may recall that in my reply to the Governor's address, I raised concerns about the Liberal Party's community project election commitment form, which so flagrantly breached the Integrity Commission's recommendations to guard against what the commission itself described as electoral bribery. It is not good enough that a process like that ends here in the parliament allocating many millions of dollars of public money, bearing in mind Mr Eslake's assertion that unfunded election commitments are a major factor in the deteriorating budget position.

The Integrity Commission has been examining these matters after a complaint about election promises in 2018 and has published a series of papers about ethical conduct and potential misconduct risks in Tasmanian parliament elections. Its findings and recommendations confirm both the gravity of the issue and the need for corrective action. While the distribution of public money to encourage voter support is commonly known by the relatively benign title of pork-barrelling, the Integrity Commission found it really amounted to indirect electoral bribery. It defined the practices as the promise of giving of a benefit to a small

or localised group of electors to buy their vote and said 'it poses a significant threat to public confidence in government'.

The Integrity Commission recommended that before the next election, Tasmania consider adopting Commonwealth provisions around grant programs together with measures to address loopholes in the Commonwealth system. That was back in 2022 and nothing happened until the major parties engaged in another bidding war in the lead-up to the 2024 election, including, again, the notorious community project election commitment program, which clearly breached just about every recommendation of the Integrity Commission.

I will move on to a little bit of infrastructure. One of the issues which has drawn considerable public attention surrounding the budget is the record spend of \$5.1 billion on infrastructure projects. We are all aware of the points made by Mr Eslake, who has questioned whether Tasmania can continue to afford what he says is the most ambitious infrastructure program of any state or territory in relation to the productive capacity of the economy. The government says we need to keep the program rolling to maintain employment and economic activity. Again, coming from the building industry, I can certainly appreciate the importance of a steady flow of work to avoid some of the stop-start issues of the past. But equally we need to ensure we don't overcook the program because if demand for labour and materials get too hot, prices very quickly head in the same direction with costs blowing out accordingly.

From my perspective, the most important factors are strategy, transparency and tight project management. To build and keep public confidence in the program, it is vital that Tasmanians can be reassured that we have the right strategic infrastructure priorities, that they are kept informed with the information that is accurate and well based, and the projects are well managed and delivering value for money with public investment. I am concerned that we have been falling short in these areas. It does not inspire confidence that after promising a new northern prison for three elections, including most recently in March, the government has suddenly announced it is no longer needed. For many people, it does not inspire public confidence that we can afford a billion-dollar roofed stadium for an AFL team, but we cannot afford the maintenance costs on the Launceston learn-to-swim pool and we cannot afford a badly needed \$150 million upgrade to the emergency department at the Royal Hobart Hospital. It certainly does not inspire public confidence that we have been unable to deliver the new berth required at Devonport to accommodate the new *Spirit of Tasmania* ships, meaning that they will be forced to operate at well below capacity when they enter service at a cost to the economy of \$350 million a year.

We know the minister was forced to walk the plank over the Devonport Port debacle. Hopefully, that will help concentrate the collective mind on key infrastructure projects and challenges. Our ports are crucial. We are an island state and an island country, and efficient port infrastructure is essential to market access and to efficient movement of the goods we need to improve life in Tasmania.

I have mentioned this one before, but I also believe that much more needs to be done to address arterial traffic flows in Hobart. Treasury's population projections show further growth across Hobart's periphery, from the Huon to the Derwent Valley and Sorell, including Kingborough, Glenorchy, Brighton and Clarence. A large majority of people across the region rely on a motor vehicle to get around and as Bob Cotgrove has pointed out, the experience of large cities suggests that it is not going to change to any great degree.

We need to start planning now to address the chokehold of Davey and Macquarie streets. Incidentally, if we do so, we will address one of our major economic barriers: lack of productivity. Traffic congestion is a huge problem now and it will only get worse until we do something serious about our major traffic arteries.

Beyond the strategic issues, we could do a lot to build confidence in our major infrastructure projects by playing straight with people. I am talking about the Devonport ferry terminal and the Hobart stadium in particular. It seems to me that every bit of information that has been forthcoming about the new Devonport berth has had to be extracted in a manner similar to pulling teeth. That is totally unacceptable in the communication age and it achieves nothing. The information gets out eventually anyway, but always accompanied by doubt that there might even be more that is being hidden.

Ms Forrest - The PAC are after it, do not worry about that.

Mr HARRISS - Yes, PAC are getting there, absolutely.

People will accept that things do not always go to plan, but they will never accept being kept in the dark when it comes to spending public money. To the Macquarie Point Stadium, I am, like most others, an AFL supporter, albeit a St Kilda supporter. I have struggled there -

Ms O'Connor - Shame.

Members interjecting.

Ms Rattray - I thought he was a Harvey Soccer Team supporter, so I do not know what is going on.

Mr HARRISS - I am. I have to explain to the children why we barrack for St Kilda quite often and I am struggling to come up with reasons.

Ms Forrest - There are others who barrack for North Melbourne, which is an even worse situation.

Ms O'Connor - Good for their character development.

Ms Forrest - Things could be worse.

Mr HARRISS - Character-building, that is right.

Being a supporter, I am behind the Tasmanian team, but as a member of this parliament I, like other members, have an obligation to ensure we get value for money for the taxpayer's dollar. I am sympathetic to the stadium project, but it needs to stack up. To use the terminology that the Premier applied to Project Marinus, I am all for it at the right price, not any price. I will be eagerly awaiting the report of the integrated assessment by the Tasmanian Planning Commission under the Project of State Significance (POSS) process. However, I would like to see much greater transparency in what is involved.

The Premier's claim that we will not spend one red cent more than \$375 million to build the stadium is, in my opinion, complete rubbish. We have more than \$600 million allocated in

this budget and that will not be the end of it. In addition to the \$375 million cash contribution, there is \$240 million Commonwealth funding which Tasmania will reimburse under GST agreements. We also know nothing can happen without the \$375 million relocation of the sewage treatment plant. We are already at a billion dollars without allowing for the inevitable cost overruns. It is simply time to put the facts on the table if we are going to build a case, not continue to play silly numbers games.

Mr President, I am nearly done and I will move that the debate stand adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

[6.24 p.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) -
Mr President, I move -

That at its rising, the Council adjourn until 11 a.m. on Wednesday
18 September 2024.

Motion agreed to.

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) -
There are a myriad of briefings tomorrow. I might ask my trusted helper to resend that around to members for their information. Mr President, I move -

That the Council do now adjourn.

The Council adjourned at 6.25 p.m.