Final headline as we go to print ♦ State Election ♦ VoteNow
Ballarat focus ♦ Union Influence ♦ The ‘General ♦ Intralot gone ♦ Rail
East West ♦ Other infrastructure ♦ Slush funds ♦ Election promises
Ultranet problems (Vic Gov ICT) ♦ Planning plans
Jeff’s Shed Extra ♦ Which side of the Bay ♦ Which taxi
Letter from Melbourne

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About the editor

Alistair Urquhart, BA LLB

Alistair Urquhart graduated from the Australian National University in Canberra, in Law, History and Politics. He may even hold the record for miles rowed on Lake Burley Griffin.

He was admitted as a barrister and solicitor to the Supreme Court of Victoria, and remains a (non-practicing) member of the Law Institute of Victoria. Previously, he graduated from high school in Bethesda, Maryland, and had many opportunities to become aware of the workings of Washington D.C.

For 30 years, he listened every Sunday evening to the late Alistair Cooke and his Letter from America. Alistair’s early career was mostly in the coal industry, where he became involved with energy, environmental and water issues, and later in the SME finance sector.

He found time to be involved in a range of community activities where he came to understand some of the practical aspects of dealing with government and meeting people across the political spectrum. He now chairs a large disability employment service, including its British operations.

About the publisher

Affairs of State

Established in 1993, is an independent Australian public affairs firm with contemporary international connections. Affairs of State provides a matrix of professional tools to multinational businesses, professional and industry associations, government agencies, pressure groups, NGOs and community causes in Australia and abroad.

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Editorial
The Result. After the Promises and the Campaigning

The MediaParty has given its stamp of approval to the new Labor government. Plenty of time before Victoria’s citizens/voters cast their own vote this weekend.

The most magnificent/largest-of-all election promises has been the East West Link, which 67 per cent, or whatever percent of voters (or surveyeders) wanted, yet the media have given some of the other 33 percent very good coverage.

Three or so marginal seats in the Ballarat region, and about four Bayside seats south of Melbourne or down the Frankston Line, is where the final focus of those behind the scenes and in the know, know the answer is.

Refer to our very, very last item in this Issue for two of the predictions as to the Winner. The editor thinks these are wrong. Your editor reckons it will be closer that the guys in the first paragraph have so predicted.

Tens and hundreds of millions, have been promised/committed by the various parties, in health, education, welfare. Some of these have been offered previously, over the years and accepted but not delivered.

Minor parties. Some new ideas on preferencing especially in seats in the Inner Melbourne arena where the Greens grow, will not bring any new parties into the Victorian Parliament.

The editor was keen to get this one hundred and ninety-eighth edition of Letter from Melbourne out before the election. It is the final in a series ( thirty eight editions) which wraps up the last four years. And it is a guide as to the next four years.

Your editor is just back from political, policy, and reality conferences in England and Scotland, and is enthusiastic for Australia to be a better or best level player in all that is can do for its people. Sounds passionate.

If you have not joined the rush to pre-voting, (twelve per cent of us are doing this) before Election Day, happy voting on Saturday.

Cover. The Premier’s Office, in the Treasury Gardens.

Another picture in this edition shows an opportunity for leaving your office across the road from the Premier’s office at 1 Collins Street, which later was the office of the Prime Minister of Australia until 1927.

State government & politics
Final headlines as we go to print
Payout of 1.1 Billion dollars if Labour wins and then cancels the East West Contract.
Ambulance board in the Gun

Ready set go
The state election campaign commenced, with Premier Denis Naphine visiting Government House to deliver election writs on Tuesday 4 November. This writ terminates the life of both Houses of Parliament. The government, without the parliamentarians, assumed a caretaker role. Thereafter, the respective parties had their own launches.

According to the Herald Sun, he said the Government had delivered on its 2010 election promise to fix Victoria’s Budget and create a strong economy for the state. His opening pitch to the electorate focused heavily on the Government’s economic management and its signature project, the East West Link. He said that a re-elected Coalition would also deliver a world-class transport system, 21st century education, infrastructure investment and healthcare.

But with less than a month until the vote, the polls suggest a victory to the Opposition. Labor leader, Daniel Andrews, said his election plan was about common sense, repairing Liberal Party damage and putting people first. ‘Are we as a state, as a community, going to settle for the highest unemployment rate on the mainland, are we going to settle for a TAFE system that’s on its knees, are we going to settle for schools that are falling down, hospitals that are full and ambulances that simply don’t arrive in time to save lives? These are very important questions,’ he said.

It seems our letterboxes are getting plenty of self-addressed fliers from the main political parties. Must be some money involved!

VoteNow
434, 000 have voted with four days to go. 3.8 million Victorians are eligible to vote, and sadly a further several hundred thousand have not enrolled I am not a Brightonian, however apparently the queue to vote down Bay Street was over in one hundred metres long at one stage

Run down
According to The Age, the Coalition is targeting rural voters with a $100 million infrastructure fund for regional cities. There is also a $100 rebate for kindergarten costs, $3.9 billion for new trains and trams and $75 million to fight youth unemployment. The Premier outlined more than $4 billion worth of election promises, including a $3.9 billion shopping list of new trains and trams, with some to be built in Ballarat and Dandenong.

Some of the infrastructure issues
East West Link; City rail capacity; Airport Rail Link; Cranbourne-Pakenham rail corridor; level crossings removals. Also, promises on international education, professional services, medical technology and manufacturing. Read
on for more details.

Head to head
Denis Naphthine and Daniel Andrews went head on in the only People’s Forum of the election campaign. According to the Herald Sun, the Liberal and Labor leaders were grilled by 100 undecided voters in the crucial seat of Frankston — currently held by controversial independent MP Geoff Shaw — in the November 19 forum hosted by the Herald Sun and Sky News. Sky News political editor David Speers, who moderated the one-hour showdown, said: “Our People’s Forums provide a unique opportunity to see the two leaders interacting with each other and an audience of undecided voters.

Along the lines
One of Melbourne’s longest railway lines, the Frankston line, the citizens in its 32-kilometre catchment shot an arrow through the heart of the Brumby government in 2010, when four seats it runs through swung to the Liberals. Since then the Coalition has splashed out on a string of projects for the line in the hope it will avoid being skewered in similar style on November 29. Central to the Frankston line investment has been the $115 million Bayside Rail Project, a mostly technical upgrade so it can accommodate the newer, bigger and quicker X'Trapolis trains, eight of which are being built.

A host of other sweeteners have been included: in the project – new platform shelters, extra myki readers to reduce queues, CCTV security cameras, rainbow-coloured network status boards modelled on the London Tube, even a fresh coat of paint for station buildings. The numbers support the Coalition’s assertion that it has done a better job at getting the trains to run on time than Labor managed.

Train musings
In The Age, an editorial by columnist Adam Carey: ‘Trains work better but seating not a sure thing.’ We all know this, those who take the train.

Too close to call
According to the Financial Review, Ballarat is the epicentre of the Victorian election campaign, taking in the most marginal seat, with parties promising more than $200 million in commitments, but the Bayside seats will determine who wins government, an expert says. Wendouree, formerly known as Ballarat West, takes in the city of Ballarat and is held by the Labor Party with a margin of 1.1 per cent, but under the electoral boundary redistribution is notionally Liberal with a 0.1 per cent margin.

On the hustings
In The Age, Farrah Tomazin wrote: ‘The would-be premier is at ease on the hustings with his wife Cathy by his side.’

Musings
The Age has carried the thoughts of former Labor minister Mary Delahunty as well as Institute of Public Affairs policy director Chris Berg, Mr Berg: ‘State politics is a pale shadow of what it once was. The federal government has taken control of so many areas of policy that state governments have little room to move, and less in which to innovate. This control has almost always been voluntarily surrendered. As a result state politics is frivolous and hollow. Everybody involved knows Canberra is where the action is.’

Selling the leaders
According to The Age, there remains one telling gulf between Daniel Andrews and his opponent. The polls show Denis Naphthine leads his challenger as preferred premier by 45 per cent to 36 per cent among voters. The message has been echoed in other opinion polls over the past year. According to Harold Mitchell: ‘modern personality-based research tends to focus on the leaders, but elections are a very different thing. Most voters have made up their mind a long time before the last month.’

Jeff weighs in
In the Herald Sun, Jeff Kennett wrote: ‘Three factors will contribute to how many of the state’s voters assess performances over the next four weeks. Personalities, policies and colour. Personality is in the main the assessment of how the two leaders Denis Naphthine and Daniel Andrews, perform. Colour, is those issues and moments that are often unexpected, can be embarrassing or uplifting but provide us with light relief from the toil of the campaign. On Wednesday November 26, I will, on these pages, give you my honest assessment of the election campaign based on five criteria. The party with the best vision for the state, the party with the best team to manage it, the party with the best commitment to promote a harmonious community, the party with the best commitment to maintaining our cultural heart and the party with the best policies for economic growth.’

War chest
According to The Age, Treasury’s pre-election budget update, providing both sides with an independent assessment of the state’s financial position for the campaign, confirms Victoria has the strongest budget position in the nation. That means both sides will have ample room for big spending announcements leading up to November 29 poll.

Union slush funds
A Labor powerbroker received more than $12,000 in election campaign donations from a union slush fund that raised money from its members, according to submissions to the Royal Commission. According to the Herald Sun, Martin Pakula, who will be Attorney General if Labor wins the State Election, benefited from the IR 21 fund he helped set up in 2003 when he was assistant secretary of the National Union of Workers. Mr Pakula said: ‘Any donations made to me by IR 21 or anyone else were properly disclosed and complied with all relevant state and federal laws.’ But Liberal Planning Minister Matthew Guy said: ‘Labor Party members treat union funds like their own personal ATM skimming operation.’

More slush fund issues
Embattled state MP Cesar Melhem doled out more than $100,000 from a controversial slush fund to a string of community and sporting groups linked to Labor factional dogfights and branch-stacking, and in one case to a community association secretly run by a senior Labor MP. According to The Age, documents lodged with the Royal Commission into Trade Union Corruption and Governance, reveal new detail of spending from Industry 2020, a slush fund run by Mr Melhem in his former role as Victorian secretary of the Australian Workers Union.

Musings
In the editorial in The Age, ‘Labor MP Cesar Melhem, who was parachuted into the state upper house seat of Western Metropolitan in May 2013, faces his first test before the electorate next month, when Victorians go to the polls. We believe that, well before November 29, Mr Melhem and Labor leader Daniel Andrews should provide clear and detailed answers about serious allegations regarding Mr Melhem’s management of a union slush fund during his seven-year tenure as state secretary of the Australian Workers’ Union.’

Not embracing reform
In The Age, Josh Gordon wrote: ‘The Labor Party needs reminding it exists to serve the
Greens will seek an agreement with Labor to help form a government in the event of a hung parliament.

**Libs deal**
Frankston MP Geoff Shaw has declared that he is likely to preference the Liberal Party in this month’s state election. According to the Herald Sun, his decision will boost the chances that his former party will win the seat, and could ultimately decide who will govern Victoria for the next four years.

**Polling (weeks to go)**
According to The Australian, the Victorian Coalition is marching towards an embarrassing defeat on November 29 unless it can exploit at the 11th hour voter uncertainty about the leadership of Labor’s Daniel Andrews. Newspoll shows that Labor is now holding a comfortable two-party-preferred lead of 54 per cent to 46 per cent, and that the Coalition’s primary vote is languishing at less than 40 per cent for the fifth survey since August last year.

**More polling**
Barely two weeks from the November 29 election, the latest Fairfax Ipsos poll showed the Coalition’s primary vote bogged on 39 per cent, down sharply from the 2010 election result of 45 per cent. The result, based on a survey of 1000 voters taken from November 6 to 9, will further alarm the Coalition, suggesting it remains in danger of becoming Victoria’s first single-term government for 60 years.

**Musings**
In the editorial in The Age, ‘Victorians will go to the election on November 29 without having the parties’ proposals independently, thoroughly and transparently analysed for their financial viability by a government office. Hence our cynicism about grand promises and potential pipe dreams.’

**Showing up**
Retiring Nationals MP Paul Weller stands to gain more than $70,000 from the taxpayer by contesting an unwinnable upper house seat in the state election. The MP was seen as having taken a hit for the team when his safe Echuca-based seat of Rodney was abolished in a redraw of electoral boundaries announced by the Victorian Electoral Commission last October. But the MP, who won in 2010 for a second time with a thumping 26 per cent margin, will not leave Parliament unawarded. Mr Weller is contesting the fourth spot on the Coalition ticket for the upper house Northern Victoria region. Although not completely out of the question, winning a fourth upper position would be very unlikely for the Coalition. Mr Weller’s unlikely bid for an upper house seat follows revelations retiring Liberal backbencher Jan Kronberg will also receive the $70,000 taxpayer-funded payment under a plan to install her in an unwinnable upper house position at this year’s state election. Ms Kronberg announced her retirement in March, saying she wanted to spend more time with her family. She later nominated for an unwinnable upper house position in the Eastern Metropolitan region. Ms Kronberg’s decision to resign created an upper house position for senior minister Mary Wooldridge, whose seat of Doncaster was also abolished in the redraw.

**Preferencing**
The Liberals will put the far-right Rise Up Australia Party ahead of the Greens, despite Premier Denis Naphine previously labelling it extreme. According to The Age, in a move emulating that of Ted Baillieu in the 2010 election, Dr Naphine announced on Thursday that the Liberal Party would place the Greens last on all how-to-vote cards. Rise Up Australia, whose leader, Daniel Nalliah, blamed the Black Saturday bushfires on God punishing Victoria for its abortion laws, is anti-Islam and against multiculturalism.

**Baillieu’s adieu**
According to The Age, when Ted Baillieu signed off the chamber was packed. Every seat was taken save one - that usually occupied by Frankston MP Geoff Shaw. ‘I leave as I arrived, convinced politics must be a quest for responsibility, not just a game about the pursuit of authority, power, position or privilege,’ at the end he received a standing ovation, handshakes and hugs, before the tall man climbed up the two-metre barrier to the members’ gallery, to embrace his family.

**The ‘General**
According to Dr Colleen Lewis from Monash University, ‘The breadth of the Auditor-General’s remit is extensive. VAGO’s 150 staff conduct financial and performance audits on about 550 public sector organisations. With such important responsibilities one would expect that the Auditor-General would have all the powers required to ‘follow the dollar’. Astonishingly, he has not. Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and other outsourcing contracts are increasingly becoming governments’ preferred way of delivering infrastructure and services to the community. Yet the Auditor-General’s capacity to effectively audit these partnerships...
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is restricted. One of its reasons for its ‘ring-fencing provisions’ is ‘to protect the commercial standing of contractors’, as opposed to the interests of taxpayers.

**Failing state**

According to a report in *The Age*, Victorian auditors-general spanning the past three decades have joined forces to warn both major parties that public scrutiny is being hamstrung by “seriously out of date” state integrity laws. In an unprecedented move, Auditor-General John Doyle and his predecessors Des Pearson, Wayne Cameron and Ches Baragwanath have united to call for unfettered powers that would give auditors the financial whackdough the ability to “follow the dollar” on taxpayer-funded services and projects delivered in partnership with the private sector (PPPs), such as the East West Link.

**Donor laws**

Bill McNee is the head of MaxVic Holdings – one of ten property firms awaiting approval for projects at the Victorian government’s signature urban renewal project at Fishermans Bend, south-west of the CBD. According to *The Age*, Mr McNee is a long-time Liberal supporter and, through another of his companies, VicLand Corporation, has been one of the biggest donors to the Victorian Liberal Party in recent times. According to Liberal Party and Australian Electoral Commission records, the company donated $100,000 over two years. He has not done anything illegal. But his situation – a developer seeking approval for a major project while also making big political donations – is not allowed in NSW. Critics say it is time Victoria caught up with its northern neighbour in reviewing political funding rules. They say all parties should be considering major reform, regardless of who forms government after November 29.

**‘Corrupt’ deals**

According to *The Australian*, the Victorian Ombudsman is investigating allegedly corrupt Liberal Party donations in marginal seats. The inquiry that threatens the government’s hold on power. Liberal candidates in two Labor held seats in south-east Melbourne have been interviewed by Ombudsman office investigators in relation to donations and council planning decisions.

**Councils involved**

Councillors at Moreland and Yarra have been labelled, ‘chardonnay-swilling, yoghurt-eating, bike-riding socialists’, for opposing the East West Link by a Casey City councillor. According to *The Age*, Casey Council voted to join a growing list of local councils spending ratepayer funds to advocate on state election issues.

**Bad sign**

The TAC has asked an external contractor to explain why one of its long-standing road safety billboards was replaced with Liberal Party advertising. According to *The Age*, a road safety campaign in Wantirna urging p-plate drivers to be careful on the roads was wrongly replaced by advertising. According to *The Age*, the government has allowed its departments, authorities and boards to engage in unchecked spending on consultancies, undermining its whole-of-government austerity drive. Detailed analysis of more than 100 departments, authorities and boards shows a dramatic surge in spending on consultants after the 2010 election, from less than $70m in 2010-11 to more than $153m last financial year.

**PUP candidates**

The Palmer United Party has opted for a team of ‘normal, ordinary Victorians’ to contest Upper House seats at the state election, aiming to seize the balance of power. PUP leader Clive Palmer unveiled 18 candidates for the November 29 poll, who will contest all of the eight Legislative Council regions.

**Record number**


**Neo-Nazi**

According to *The Age*, a Liberal Party activist working on the party’s campaign in key marginal seats is a former neo-Nazi. Scott Harrison has been the vice-President of the Deakin University Liberal Club.

**Election count**

Almost one-third of the total Victorian election vote will remain uncounted on election night, suggesting it could take days to finalise the result. According to *The Age*, the Victorian Electoral Commission has revealed it is bracing for a 30 per cent jump in the number of early votes compared to the 2010 result.

**Porn ring**

Denis Naphine has challenged former government staffer Don Coulson to name the members of an alleged ‘pornography ring’ that swapped videos within 1 Treasury Place. According to the *Herald Sun*, Mr Naphine said the ‘dissingloured’ former adviser, who is involved in a legal dispute with the Government over severance pay, had made a ‘number of allegations’ that have ‘no substance’.

**Porn ring (2)**

According to the *Herald Sun*, Mr Coulson was sacked in March last year, days after Dr Naphine took over as premier. He is suing for wrongful dismissal and is going to the County Court seeking $67,000 and costs in redundancy payments he claims the Government owes him.

In response, the Government has countersued, claiming that Mr Coulson must return $30,000 in severance pay because he had pornography in his office while working for Mr Baillieu.

**FOI problems**

According to a report in *The Australian*, the Victorian government provided false and misleading information on a Freedom of Information request that led to parliament being lied to or misled, according to a former senior adviser to the Premier. Don Coulson, who is fighting a wrongful dismissal claim, has claimed the Premier’s Office provided wrong information to the FOI Commissioner on how claims were processed and who processed them.

**Tearing sheds**

Denis Naphine tore strips off Health Minister David Davis outside the Upper House recently, according to the *Herald Sun*. In a heated exchange in front of surprised onlookers, the Premier was seen making ‘wild gesticulations’ during what one Liberal said looked like a ‘master-servant conversation’. The crisis followed Opposition attempts to introduce a Bill to force the release of data, including ambulance response times.

The Government, led in the Legislative Council by Mr Davis, had initially granted permission. But at the same time, the Leader of Government Business in the Legislative Assembly, Louise Asher, was vigorously defending the Coalition’s denial of leave to Labor to introduce the same Bill there. A rattled Mr Davis’s treatment of his deputy, Wendy Lovell, ordering her to keep quiet during the drama, also shocked colleagues.

**Federal**

**GST move**

According to *The Australian*, Victoria will block the overhaul of federal-state financial relations until the federal government deals with inequities in the GST carve-up.

**More GST and revenue**

According to the *Herald Sun*, Prime Minister Tony Abbott is renewing his plea for premiers to have a discussion about revenue – again opening up the debate about the potential for new taxes or an increase to the GST.

**Gonski doubts**

According to *The Age*, Victoria’s so-called Gonski schools funding deal has been thrown into question amid documents suggesting ‘no final decision’ has been reached on how much federal money the state will receive. Despite the Victorian government claiming success when it finally secured a heads of agreement with the federal Government before last year’s federal election, freedom of information documents have cast doubt on the validity of the deal and how the funding will flow under Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

**Jeloff weighs in**

According to a report in *The Australian*, Jeff Kennett says the federal government has been unfair to ‘Team Liberal’ and would never has increased petrol tax if there was an election in NSW or Western Australia, proof that the federal government is ‘very much’ based out of NSW.

**Agriculture**

**Big win**

Victorian dairy farmers have hit pay dirt, with China preparing to lift all tariffs on Australian milk powder and baby formula. According to the *Herald Sun*, a deal inked in (think now signed) between the two countries will see import tariffs on Aussie milk powders wound down and abolished by 2018-19.

**Grazing licences**

Thousands of licences allowing cattle to graze along river banks will soon be renewed
without any additional measures to reduce pollution caused by an inevitable culprit: cow manure. According to The Age, the Victorian government admits that a five-year renewal of Crown water-frontage licences will go ahead within weeks without any significant change in policy, despite ongoing warnings that more needs to be done to boost the health of Victorian rivers.

Water woes
According to The Age, a growing number of farmers in north-western Victoria are carting water for their stock and it's not yet summer.

Good jobs
Primesafe is the statutory body responsible for maintaining Victoria's reputation as a producer of clean safe and fresh meat and seafood. It is looking for seven board directors, in particular female directors, www.depi.vic.gov.au/primesafe.

Arts
Music boost
Melbourne's music industry will land a $22.2 million boost if Labor wins the state election. According to the Herald Sun, Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews announced the funding package including grants to help local artists: embarking on interstate or overseas tours; music festival support, and sound and light engineering services. Melbourne music legend Molly Meldrum said the plan was music to his ears. 'Without a doubt, whether Sydney likes it or not, Melbourne is the music capital of Australia,' Molly said.

New boss
Claire Spencer is the incoming chief executive of the city's performing arts hub, Arts Centre Melbourne.

Education
Tech claim
According to The Age: 'the claim Labor says it will bring back tech schools across Victoria - does it stack up? The $125 million earmarked for this project will fund ten technical learning centres, including Ballarat, Geelong and Whittlesea.

The Knox Innovation Opportunity and Sustainability Centre (KIOSC) in Wantirna will be used as a model for the training centres. Finding Half True. Calling these centres tech schools creates an inaccurate impression. They are not the schools the community might expect when the word 'tech' is repeatedly used. They are not the schools the community might expect when the word 'tech' is repeatedly used. Without a doubt, whether Sydney likes it or not, Melbourne is the music capital of Australia,' Molly said.

Cash for schools
Labor has promised to build eleven new schools, including eight in outer suburban growth areas, should it win power at the state election. According to The Age, Opposition leader Daniel Andrews and his entourage travelled to Mernda, in Melbourne’s outer north, to announce $50.5 million of funding for outer suburban schools. But the government described the promise as a ‘crucial hoax’, insisting it had been ‘grossly underfunded’.

Cash limbo
Almost $1.6 billion worth of public school assets have been written off as ‘obsolete’ by the state government in a move which has ‘significantly’ cut funding requirements for new classrooms. Victoria’s financial watchdog has warned. According to The Age, in a highly unusual intervention, Auditor-General John Doyle has refused to sign off on a final tally of the state’s finances for the 2013-14 financial year amid a heated debate about the valuation of school assets. The government bases its valuation of school buildings on student enrolments, rather than the actual capacity of the school. As a result, the Education Department has declared almost $1.6 billion worth of school assets ‘obsolete’.

Rebuked
According to The Age, Treasurer Michael O’Brien has been accused of verballing Victoria’s former auditor-general Des Pearson after claiming he ‘agreed to’ a public school valuation method which resulted in $1.6 billion worth of class room assets being written-off as ‘obsolete’.

Needed
A leaked map of proposed schools in Melbourne’s outer north shows more than a dozen new schools are needed to cope with massive demand expected for enrolments. According to The Age, the Education Department confirmed it has identified 14 school sites in the Epping North and Mernda/Doreen growth areas, but it currently owns only half of them.

Mooted
Victoria will need up to 550 new schools within the next two decades, according to an analysis of population forecasts. And most of the demand will be in the crowded inner suburbs and outer growth corridors, according to the Grattan Institute’s Peter Goss. According to The Age, both sides of politics are under pressure in the lead-up to the state election from lobby groups demanding new schools.

Uni rankings
According to a report in The Age, Melbourne University rose one place to 33 in the latest Times Higher Education World University Rankings, claiming a high of 89 in 2012. The Australian National University came in at 45 this year. Monash University rose from 91 last year to 83. Deakin was ranked in the top 350 while Sydney University moved up 12 places to 60.

Welfare
According to The Age, the Victorian government has promised to give every state primary school access to welfare officers if it is re-elected, expanding a commitment made four years ago.

Kinders too
Denis Naphine has offered $100 to parents of kindergarten children as part of his bid to woo families and win the election.

Labor’s offer
According to The Age, children from families holding concession cards will receive a subsidy of up to $225 for school camps, as part of the education package Labor is taking to the state election.

Failing master
After months of anticipation by principals and teachers, the government finally released a rural education policy that schools had hoped would bridge the gaps between city and country students. According to The Age, despite acknowledging systemic problems, the government admits its five-year strategy simply ‘leverages existing programs, services and funding’ to tackle the issue. With weeks to the state election, the lack of new investment could prove sensitive for the Coalition. Education is a key battleground at the poll, with both major parties promising upgrades to schools in marginal areas around the state. Regional Victoria is particularly critical, with each side keen to woo voters in knife-edge electorates around Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong.

Jobs for IT insiders
Senior Victorian education department officials bought shares in and took jobs with the company given a $60 million contract to deliver the failed Ultranet schools IT project. According to The Age, the revelations will re-ignite questions over the former Labor government’s handling of the project – dumped last year by the Coalition after its cost blew out to $180 million – and come as Victoria’s anti-corruption agency continues its probe of the (education) department.

Dyslexia funding
Children with dyslexia and autism could receive assistance at Victorian schools for the first time under an Andrews government, with Labor to announce it would review the controversial funding system.

Swimming free
Free swimming lessons could be rolled out for primary school children following Victoria’s worst drowning toll in ten years. According to the Herald Sun, Life Saving Victoria chief executive Nigel Taylor said the alarming proportion of victims who didn’t intend to be in the water when they drowned underlined the urgency for mandatory swimming lessons.

Asian languages
Asian languages are increasing their prominence in Victorian classrooms, with the number of primary school student learning them surging by about twelve per cent in just a year. According to the Herald Sun, Education Department figures reveal more than 225,000 government primary school students were this year studying a second language, up from 200,000 last year.

Cash for religion
According to the Herald Sun, if the Victorian government is re-elected, it would give ACCESS Ministries an initial $400,000 grant this financial year, and then $400,000 a year for the next four financial years.
Last week I applauded both major parties’ adoption of many of our election agenda recommendations for business and state economic growth, but stated that business is disappointed that the opportunity to lift the payroll tax threshold remains outstanding.

My comments came as over 250 of Victoria’s business leaders gathered to hear VECCI’s report back on the economic commitments of both major parties prior to the November 29 state election.

VECCI’s Taking Care of Business state election agenda calls for action to support jobs, infrastructure, skills and international engagement and we have seen significant pledges in these areas that will help raise business competitiveness.

Key policy outcomes include:

**Jobs**
- Strong job creation plans, with the Coalition pledging to create 200,000 jobs over five years and Labor 100,000 over two years through a range of measures, including tax incentives.

**Infrastructure**
- Support for major infrastructure projects including building a metro rail tunnel, privatising the Port of Melbourne, removing level crossings and widening the Tullamarine Freeway.

The Coalition’s significant rolling stock investment, with a strong emphasis on local content and job creation, has been welcomed by industry and Victorian Labor now needs to demonstrate a similar commitment.

Two key points of difference between the major parties relate to their positions on constructing the East West Link and expanding the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. Both projects are strongly supported by VECCI, but only have commitment from the Coalition to date.

These projects are vitally important to business and we would hope that Victorian Labor reconsiders its positions if elected to government, as the next term is predicted to see an increasingly strong environment for infrastructure investment.

With forecasts showing the state’s budget surplus rising to $3 billion in 2017-18, the next government will have the capacity to make significant investments in infrastructure without incurring debt or raising taxes.

**Skills**
- Strong commitments to apprenticeships and training to support the creation of a well-trained, job-ready workforce.

In keeping with VECCI’s recommendations, Victorian Labor committed to reforming the vocational training system by improving VET regulation and undertaking a review of VET funding.

**International engagement**
- Commitments to further boost Victoria’s strong international engagement record through an expanded inbound and outbound trade missions program and the establishment of new Victorian Government Business Offices in South America and Asia.

Further commitment from both parties in supporting business to seize growth opportunities that present in the Asian Century, as well as those related to the recently signed free trade agreements, would be welcomed. VECCI is particularly calling for increased support to capitalise on strong international demand for Victorian products in the services, healthcare and agribusiness sectors.

Business is frustrated that neither major party has committed to raising the payroll tax threshold from $550,000 to $850,000, as this measure would reduce business costs and encourage job creation.

With the unemployment rate predicted to stay above six per cent for the next two years, this change is required urgently.

While November 29 is fast-approaching, both parties still have the opportunity to influence business.

Business is asking why the parties are not taking the opportunity to create jobs by lifting what is currently Australia’s lowest payroll tax threshold.

We will keep pushing policy makers to adopt outstanding commitments before the election and into the new term of government if required.

I also urge voters to consider their choice this election.

Do not waste your vote. Use it wisely to make sure Victoria has a majority government with a mandate to deliver on its commitments.

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Mark Stone,  
Chief Executive of VECCI.
Quitting religion classes
The Uniting Church will withdraw from religious instruction in state schools unless the group responsible for the controversial program improves instructor training and abandons compulsory volunteer payments. According to The Age, Uniting Church moderator Dan Wootton said church members held ‘deep concerns’ about Access Ministries’ policies and practices. The Uniting Church also wants Access Ministries to give member churches more say in the policy and direction of the group.

Pay up
Some of Melbourne’s most sought-after state schools have topped the list for parent and community contributions. According to The Age, Education Department figures show state primary and secondary schools received more than $360 million in parent and community payments last year. The figure — which takes in subject levies, class materials, camps and excursions, donations and fundraising — was up almost 10 per cent on the previous period.

Unknown cash
The University of Melbourne has been unable to draw up a budget for next year due to uncertainty about the federal government’s plans for deregulation, according to vice-chancellor Professor Glyn Davis.

Energy
Fracking
The National Party supports the current moratorium on fracking in Victoria but has previously voted against a permanent ban. According to The Age, fracking has become a critical issue in Buninyong, as three fracking licences have been issues to Mantle Mining, critical issue in Buninyong, as three fracking (that provide a veto to landowners within two kilometres of a proposed wind farm).

Parks policy
Tensions are simmering in the Victorian government after Agriculture Minister Peter Walsh unexpectedly declared the Coalition would go to the election with a policy for no new national parks. According to The Age, environmentalists have been pushing for the creation of a proposed Great Forest National Park stretching between Kinglake, Baw Baw and Eildon in a bid to protect the Leadbeater’s possum after the 2009 bushfires destroyed 45 per cent of its habitat.

Discounts
Victoria’s most-complained about energy retailer is slashing overdue bills by hundreds of dollars in an unusual bid to clear outstanding debt and save on external collection fees. According to The Age, Energy Australia is cold-calling residential customers to negotiate discounts between 5 and 20 per cent for overdue gas and electricity bills if they are paid immediately.

Wind farms
Environment groups have welcomed Labor’s election pledge to relax planning laws that restrict how close to homes wind farms can be built, but they say the reforms should go further. According to The Age, Opposition leader Daniel Andrews vowed to remove restrictive planning laws put in place by the state government that provide a veto to landowners within two kilometres of a proposed wind farm.

Environment & conservation

Commercial fishing
Hobson Bay anglers have welcomed the Victorian Government’s promise it will end commercial fishing in Port Phillip Bay if re-elected. According to The Age, Premier Denis Napthine said all rent received from the site would be reinvested back into national parks. The deal with Point Leisure Group, headed by developer Richard Schelmerdine, begins in July 2017, and marks the first lease under the Coalition’s drive to open up Victoria’s national parks to ‘eco-tourism’.

Tragedy
A 33 year old woman from Chirnside Park was tragically killed by a falling branch whilst camping in northern Victoria recently.

Fire week
November 16-23 is Fire Action Week – a week designed as an opportunity for residents to plan ahead.

Point Nepean deal
A lease for a new luxury hot springs resort in the Point Nepean National Park has been quietly rushed through by the government in its final days before it entered caretaker mode. According to The Age, the move has dismayed and confused opponents of the project, who weeks ago rallied at the site, lobbying the government to scrap the current proposal or at least take the issue to the state election.

The 50-year agreement covers 64 hectares of national park, including the site of an old quarantine station made up of more than 50 buildings overlooking the Mornington Peninsula coastline. A Victorian government spokesman said all rent received from the site would be reinvested back into national parks. The deal with Point Leisure Group, headed by developer Richard Schelmerdine, begins in July 2017, and marks the first lease under the Coalition’s drive to open up Victoria’s national parks to ‘eco-tourism’.

Tinder dry
Parts of Victoria are ready to burn and people in high-risk areas need to prepare for what could be a dangerous summer for bushfires. According to the Herald Sun, Country Fire Authority state duty officer Peter Lucas said those living in the state’s northwest, in particular, needed to be on alert as the first total fire ban of the 2014/15 season was declared in the Malique district.

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penguins which were washed ashore dead at Altona Beach in September were found to have died after becoming entangled in a commercial fishing net.

**Balance at sea**

Locally caught fish, such as snapper and flathead, could disappear from seafood shops under a Victorian government push to ban commercial fishing nets from Port Phillip Bay and Corio Bay, fisherman warn. According to The Age, the Victorian government has committed to a buyback of commercial fishing licences within ten years, pledging $20 million to begin the process if it is re-elected. Victorian Premier Denis Napthine told the Carrum Surf Life Saving Club that the removal of commercial fishing from the bays would mean more fish for amateur anglers.

The promise forms part of a $60.5 million package for a ‘better bay’. “This will be a huge boost to 75,000 recreational fishers who will be guaranteed a better catch when we don’t have commercial net fishing in Corio and Port Phillip Bay,” he said. But commercial fisherman have slammed the move, saying they haven’t been consulted, the bays are not being overfished and that any ban would ruin their livelihood. They also believed removing commercial fishing would make it harder for Victorians to buy local varieties caught in the bay, such as snapper, flathead and King George whiting.

**Under pressure**

The Yarra River is coming under increasing pressure from development along its banks and needs even greater planning protections put in place, its newly appointed river keeper says. According to The Age, Andrew Kelly began recently as the new Yarra River keeper, replacing the first-ever keeper of the river, Ian Penrose, who was in the position for almost a decade.

**Promised land**

A promise to turn a former freeway reservation into parkland, made by Liberal Party candidates at the last state election, has not been kept, residents in Melbourne’s outer east say. According to The Age, the Healesville Freeway Reservation was set aside by the Bolte government in 1969 to build the F9 freeway from Richmond to Healesville. Some of that freeway was built, but the section between Vermont South and Lilydale was abandoned long ago and ever since has been used for walking, horse and cattle agistment and by locals for recreation.

**Station fine**

Alcoa’s controversial Anglesea coal-fired power plant emissions are within Environment Protection Authority limits, the environmental authority this week said. The mine, subject of a protracted campaign by anti-coal protesters, is expected to close unless a buyer can be found – killing off more than 80 jobs – following the closure of Alcoa’s Point Henry smelter at Geelong.

**Saving the swamp**

According to a report in The Age, an environment group has attacked the Victorian government for signing up just days before entering caretaker mode to ‘exclusive negotiations’ with a developer for a $4 billion marina on public land near Geelong.

**Firing line**

permits to kill more than half a million native animals including seals, cockatoos, wombats and black swans have been approved by the Victorian government. According to the Herald Sun, the cull licences were issued by the Department of Sustainability and Environment over the past five years and have reached an all time high, causing outrage among animal activists.

**Ducks**

Animals Australia and the RSPCA took out a full page ad, with 53 organisations signed up, asking the Opposition to implement a policy opposing the recreational shooting of waterbirds.

**Events**

**Set to grow**

The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, nicknamed Jeff’s Shed after former premier Jeff Kennett, will grow by up to 10,000 square metres, or 30 per cent, under initial expansion plans announced by the Victorian government. According to The Age, a new building would be built on a car park in South Wharf between the current exhibition centre and the West Gate Freeway overpass.

**Jehovah’s Witnesses**

About 70,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses descended on Melbourne recently. The three-day convention at Etihad Stadium marked the centennial of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ belief that Jesus Christ began ruling God’s kingdom in 1914. Worshippers also believe Satan has ruled the world since being cast out of heaven.

**Music week**

The Melbourne Town Hall Grand Organ is a part of Melbourne Music Week – 14 to 23 November. This wonderful Organ provides regular opportunities for listeners.

**Gaming**

**Intralot**

Gaming giant Intralot has abandoned its Victorian Kenex and scratchies business after $63 million in losses during a disastrous seven-year gamble. According to the Herald Sun, the dramatic walkout is a major blow to Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews, who was the former Labor government’s gaming minister during the bulk of negotiations over the controversial deal. Labor hailed the 10-year licence as a big boon for the state in 2007, saying the new gaming markets would boost coffers to the tune of $3 billion.

But it has flopped, resulting in a low tax take, angering punters and frustrating newsagents. Gaming Minister Edward O’Donohue took aim at Andrews, saying that while he had left the gaming ministry two months before lottery contracts were signed ‘his fingerprints are all over them’.

‘The extent of the money Daniel Andrews and Labor lost in gaming is scandalous — so far it’s $3.5 billion, with another $830 million in claims still before the courts,’ he said.

**Stay out Packer**

The Herald Sun has noted that the Victorian government has warned casino owner James Packer to stay out of the election campaign. This followed a Packer colleague being overheard by the press that P was unhappy. The apparent endorsement follows an eight month stand off between the Victorian government and Crown Casino over its tax rates, which finally ended with a deal in August. In September, Labor then agreed to support the extension of Crown’s operating licence until 2050, in return for brokering a deal in which the casino would retrain 500 retrenched workers at its in house TAFE over four years.

**Denial**

Later, James Packer tried to hose down the hysteria, saying he has no intention of getting involved in the Victorian election.

**Sports clubs**

Suburban sports clubs are becoming increasingly reliant on pokies to stay financially afloat, with more than $400 million pumped into the sector every year. According to The Age, clubs that own gaming venues or benefit through grants from pokies revenue shows the depth of the gaming industry’s infiltration. Football, cricket, racing, bowls and golf clubs across the state all have stakes in the industry that reaped a total revenue of $2.5 billion in 2013-14.

**Heavy punters**

Law enforcement agencies have targeted a suspected crime syndicate deeply involved in Victorian horse racing and with ties to the AFL. According to The Age, the syndicate has generated millions of dollars over the past decade on thoroughbred racing, harness racing and AFL games, often using leaked information from sport insiders.

**Health**

A dedicated heart hospital will be built in Melbourne’s south-east after Labor matched a government promise of a $120 million facility. Premier Denis Napthine announced that a Victorian government would build the five storey hospital in the grounds of the Monash Medical Centre in Clayton.

**Medi-tech pledge**

Labor has promised one-third of the funding needed to build a $180 million centre for cutting-edge new medical technologies at St Vincent’s Hospital if elected. According to The Age, Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews said the biomedical engineering centre would be the first of its type in Australia and would build 1800 new jobs a year. Work already underway on the centre includes the Bionics Institute and Melbourne, Swinburne and Wollongong universities. St Vincent’s Hospital director of orthopaedics, Peter Choong, said the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery would allow experts to work closely with patients on the same site.

**Drunk abuse**

Nine out of ten emergency doctors and nurses have been assaulted or physically threatened by drunk patients in the past year, a damning new report has found. According to The Herald Sun, fearful medics say they are also abused hourly by alcohol-fuelled thugs in Victoria’s emergency departments, compromising the care and safety of other patients while dominating
stretched resources.

Casey care
According to The Age, a $106 million expansion of the Casey Hospital, including the region’s first intensive care unit, will be completed by 2018 if Labor wins office.

Peter Mac
Australia’s wealthiest family have gone to court fearing their long-held naming rights for the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre are at risk. According to the Herald Sun, the Smorgons — worth an estimated $2.7 billion — are worried the hospital might leave the family name off its planned new Parkville home. The main wing at Peter Mac in East Melbourne is emblazoned with ‘Smorgon Family Building’ following the family’s $1.5 million donation to assist construction in 1994.

But in a Supreme Court affidavit tycoon Graham Smorgon outlines concerns over recognition of the family at the new $1 billion Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre. He alleges the agreement stated that if Peter Mac were to move, it would name a building “of similar size, quality and prominence” after the family.

Smorgon claims in court documents that he wrote to Peter Mac in November 2013, seeking reassurances that the family name would be used at the new Parkville centre it will share with Melbourne Health and the University of Melbourne from 2016. The hospital replied in July, claiming the naming agreement had expired because the family company S.C.L Holdings Pty Ltd which made the donation — was voluntarily wound up in 2006.

Drownings
According to the Herald Sun, forty seven people drowned in Victoria last year, the highest number recorded in ten years.

Sperm donors
According to The Age, Victoria’s donor sperm supply has plunged in the past year as fertility clinics struggle to recruit enough men to meet demand, strengthening a push for donor sperm to be imported from overseas.

Ad spending
According to a report in The Age, the Victorian government has been criticised for spending $1.8 million in five months on political advertising about health.

Ambo data
Ambulance Victoria is seeking a court order to hide damning secret data about paramedic response times for the most urgent calls for help this year.

Resigning
According to the Herald Sun, the head of Victoria’s ambulance service, Greg Sassella, has resigned amid pressure over a blowout in response times and a two year pay dispute.

Contribute
The Victorian government wants to hear from people with a disability, about their life and community since the Victorian state disability plan 2013-16 commenced on 1 January 2013. Visit www.dhs.vic.gov.au/disabilityplansurvey

Business & investment

Hi-tech
A group backed by the federal government’s Co-operative Research Centres program is re-injecting life back into manufacturing in the embattled Victorian city of Geelong through an innovative joint venture with a Swiss speciality chemicals company. According to The Australian, local biotech firm Cytomatrix and the Zurich-based international functional materials company HeiQ Materials have formed a joint venture known as HeiQ Australia to manufacture high-value nanofibres with applications across a range of sectors.

VACC
In a half page advertisement in the Herald Sun, VACC wrote: ‘Time for the next Victorian government to shift its automotive industry focus. The next state government will oversee the end of car manufacturing in this state. But this will not mean the end of the Victorian automotive industry. The automotive retail, service and repair industry employs 80,000 Victorians, 50,000 of which are employed by VACC’s 5,500 members.’

$150m boost
Swiss energy group Vitol is adamant that oil refining in Australia can be a profitable business, so much so that it is tipping $150 million into its Geelong plant. According to The Age, Vitol, which bought Shell’s downstream business for $2.9 billion three months ago, is progressing with a $1 billion five-year investment plan, which includes upgrading the Geelong refinery. But the plan to salvage the marginal refining business has come at a cost. Sources say the company has axed about 10 per cent of its workforce with white collar jobs accounting for most of the cuts.

Industrial relations

Jobs plan
According to a report in The Age, Premier Denis Napthine and Treasurer Michael O’Brien unveiled a $33.4 billion jobs plan recently, but refused to detail how much was being spent on new initiatives.

Rat hunting
The Victorian Government is hunting a mole in the public service after the Opposition trumped its jobs policy a day before the announcement. According to the Herald Sun, Labor’s policy brochure even included a shot from the portfolio of stock photos the Government planned to use.

Labor’s pitch
Labor has made an ambitious $1 billion pitch to voters with a pledge to create 100,000 jobs if it wins the November state poll. According to The Age, payroll tax relief for companies that give jobs to the long-term jobless and young people is a key policy of Opposition Leader Dan Andrews’ employment package which is designed to tackle the state’s unemployment, which at 6.8 per cent is at its highest rate in 13 years.

But Mr Andrews refused to say how a Labor government would fund the plan, saying it would reveal all of its policy costings before the poll. Treasurer Michael O’Brien attacked the policy saying most of the ideas already existed under the Naphthe government.

Jobless rate
Victoria’s unemployment rate is on track to exceed Tasmania’s, peaking at 7.3 per cent in 2016-17, a new analysis says. By then its government debt will be the highest of any Australian state. Victoria is also suffering from what Dr Stephen Anthony believes was an unplanned explosion in population.

‘Fast population growth helped Victoria at the time, but now there’s a need to build infrastructure to service that population. We are seeing that in the election. It will hold the budget back, giving Victoria the highest net debt of any Australian state by 2016-17.’

Mental health issues
The civil claim against controversial unionist Kathy Jackson, who is being sued for $1.4 million for fraud and theft, has been delayed due to her mental health problems. According to The Age, the Federal Court heard evidence of Ms Jackson’s health problems, certain details of which were suppressed by Justice Richard Tracey.

Fronting together
Tony Abbott and Denis Napthine recently fronted a media conference together to announce a joint Victoria Police and AFP taskforce to investigate alleged corruption and crime links. The Victorian government has asked the Royal Commission into Union Corruption to investigate whether the construction union should be deregistered because of ongoing criminal behaviour. According to The Age, Premier Denis Napthine confirmed that the Victorian government had made a submission to the Royal Commission, asking for it to examine ‘whether they should be a recommendation with regard to deregistering of the CFMEU’. ‘We’ve made a submission to the royal commission suggesting the Royal commission examine this matter, particularly in light of the behaviour of the CFMEU on the Myer Emporium issue and a number of other issues across the building and construction sites in Victoria.’

Andrew’s links
Victorian Labor leader Daniel Andrews has refused to distance himself from the CFMEU in the wake of the royal commission being told that the union’s boss should be charged with blackmail. According to The Age, Mr Andrews’ links to the construction union have been called into question after counsel assisting the royal commission into trade unions formally recommended charges against state secretary John Setka.

Whose turn
Conservative columnist Andrew Bolt reckons that the deals/denariosity for the fire fighters and paramedics are to come from the wages of other taxpayers many of who are earning much less. These union campaigns have been going on for a year or two, if you have not noticed it on their vehicles.

Tee too
According to the Herald Sun, Labor’s planning spokesman has been accused of having a potential conflict of interest over his ties to the militant construction union. Brian Tee is a member of the CFMEU and as planning minister if Labor wins the next election, he is likely to rule on developments funded by union
entities.

Bolt's musings

According to Andrew Bolt in the Herald Sun: ‘No party with respect for the law should be where Victorian Labor is today – especially not after the submission to the royal commission into union corruption. Labor keeps accepting CFMEU donations – nearly $200,000 to just Victorian Labor last year. It still lets CFMEU vote in Labor Party conferences.’

More musings

In The Age, IPA policy director Chris Berg wrote: ‘Labor planning spokesman Brian Tee insisted he would not resign his membership of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union if he became planning minister. This is rather incredible. Federally, the Labor Party is slowly, emotionally wrenching itself through reform to separate the party from the unions. It’s long overdue. The relationship hurts both sides.’

In The Australian, Henry Ergas wrote: the ‘unions are poised to control Victoria. If Labor wins, it means a return to the bad old days in construction.’

Desal links

The royal commission into trade unions has been asked to probe the role of a crane supervisor with links to Mick Gatto. The concern is that a Thiess employee, whose job was to organise crane activity on the desalination project, had ties with underworld powerbroker Mr Gatto and a senior Rebels biker. Mr Gatto’s Elite Cranes was among a number of heavy-lift operators that had been contracted to work on parts of the multi-billion dollar project. Over the past three years, several sources have given information, including formal statements, to government bodies detailing concerns about cranes on the site. These claims include that up to three times as many cranes as originally planned had been present on the site and that a number of cranes often appeared to be inactive.

Bitter war

According to the Herald Sun, state secretary Luba Grigorovitch, 28, the youngest ever and first female state secretary of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, says she has been subjected to ‘persecutions about economic management, government strategists hope this will be offset by perceptions about economic management, government, particularly in the crucial battle issue is now seen as a major problem for the Coalition by 48 per cent to 38 per cent. But government strategists hope this will be offset by perceptions about economic management, government. The Age, ICBC chief executive Alistair Maclean’s warning was contained in a new e-newsletter: produced by ICBC to promote its work - part of which involves educating the public service about combating corruption and strengthening the integrity of the bureaucracy. Figures from the agency’s latest annual report show that in 2013-14, ICBC assessed more than 4800 allegations of public sector corruption and police misconduct. It also began 24 investigations, including allegations of fraud, theft, receipt of secret commissions, bribery, and the unlawful release of confidential information. But the corruption-busting agency is likely to come under the spotlight again: after the election, because Parliament failed to pass new laws designed to strengthen ICBC by giving it new power to investigate MPs for misconduct in public office, and by lowering the threshold at which it can start investigating allegations.'

ICBC changes

Key former advisers to the state government have rejected proposed changes to its anti-corruption commission, arguing they do not go far enough and Victoria would be left with a defective integrity regime ill-equipped to fight corruption, according to a report in The Age.

Eliminate harassment

According to the Herald Sun, Victorian Police Chief Commissioner Ken Lay has called the Human Rights Commissioner and established: a taskforce to rid his organisation of sexual harassment and intimidation.

Ice dealers

According to The Age, more ice dealers will be locked up for longer, as part of a Coalition election pledge to crack down on the highly addictive drug. Under the proposed changes, ice would be treated as a more serious drug than heroin and cocaine.

Death charges

Four police officers are facing disciplinary charges over the death of a man abandoned outside Dandenong police station. Shocking CCTV footage from inside the station shows police officers smirking as a drunk Gong Ling Tang, 53, writhed in pain and crawled from his cell in May 2010.

Law refined

Police can now issue family violence intervention orders around the clock, rather than just outside business hours, under new laws that came into effect earlier this month. The laws also allow for police to detain people who contravene family violence orders to be named publicly without a victim needing court permission.

Bike thefts

In the past financial year more than 5000 stolen bicycles were reported to Victoria Police, data obtained by The Age show. According to The Age, in some postcodes the numbers of stolen bicycles now outstrip stolen cars. These areas include the central Melbourne suburbs of Carlton, Fitzroy and Parkville, and the Victorian towns of Wangaratta, Sale and Horsham.

Hot cars

Irresponsible parents have fuelled a ten per cent rise in children being locked in hot cars over the past year, shocking paramedics who are bracing for scorching conditions in the months ahead. According to the Herald Sun, in the past year, paramedics were called to 1165 cases of children under thirteen being locked in a car— including an average of four a day during the most dangerous period between December and March.

New role

According to The Herald Sun, former police union boss Greg Davies will represent vulnerable Victorians as the state’s first victims of crime commissioner.

Local government

East West reprisal fears

Moonee Valley Council fears wider repercussions from the Victorian government if it launches legal action against Planning Minister Matthew Guy over the East West Link, the council’s chief executive says. According to The Age, the council has been offered more than $70 million as a result of the toll road’s impact on the municipality – with a possible extra $15 million for ‘supplementary initiatives’. These include the $15.7 million redevelopment of Delney’s Park, which was completed for $2.5 million in 2011 for children from nearby housing commission flats. The playground will be removed to make way for the toll road, and rebuilt nearby.

New site

According to The Herald Sun, Queen Victoria Market will be enhanced with a new retail strip after Melbourne City Council spent $76 million on a prime block of land. Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said the purchase of the Munro site on the corner of Queen and Therry Streets would allow the opening of shops and building offices, medium-density apartments and a carpark.

Ombudsman investigates

Casey Council has refused to comment on reports that the Victorian Ombudsman is investigating allegedly corrupt Liberal Party donations in the southeast and council planning decisions. According to The Australian, councillor Geoff Atleht, who is the Liberal candidate for Cranbourne, and Cr Amanda Stapledon, who is standing for the Coalition in Narre Warren North, have been questioned by the Ombudsman’s office investigators in relation to alleged corrupt donations and council planning decisions made in the past year, it has been reported.

Councils musings

In The Age, Gareth Hutchens wrote: ‘This idea comes from Professor Percy Allan, a former secretary of the NSW Treasury. It can be found in a chapter he wrote for the latest report by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia. Mr Allan has taken the idea of virtual councils from the United States, where such models are found in abundance.'
He says these models for local councils can be introduced to Australia to solve a problem that has convinced local politicians they need to merge with neighbouring councils: the need to find cost efficiencies. ‘The bigger is better’ argument is not always apt for a public bureaucracy, where being nimble, flexible and cost conscious can be difficult, given the bigger span of control,’ MAllan says. With the outsourcing of services, local governments could become far more efficient, doing away with the need for mergers.

NBN
Local councils are already flat-chat maintaining roads and managing rubbish and now they want to keep you connected. According to The Age, councils have approached NBN Co about becoming internet service providers, says the company’s chief customer officer, John Simon. Speaking at the NBN Rebooted event in Sydney, Simon said local councils were the only government bodies to have approached NBN Co about becoming internet communication providers, buying wholesale phone and internet services from the organisation.

Recycling
According to the Herald Sun, inner-city residents who recycle their rubbish efficiently are poised for hundreds of thousands of dollars in discounts under a new Melbourne City Council scheme. Households taking part will have rubbish weighed and receive points to be redeemed for vouchers for cafes, restaurants, grocery stores, cinemas, events and other services.

Ceding power
City planners say they have been left with little power to haggle for desperately needed affordable housing because high-rise developers are already getting what they want. According to The Age, Melbourne City Council experts want ‘bonuses’ to be given to those that build subsidised apartments, in a scenario that could see authorities trade off extra tower height for community benefit.

Good job
Melbourne City Council is looking for a CEO. The CEO leads a team of 1445 people with a budget of $374 million to manage the Council’s business and deliver services. Send details to melb@spencerstuart.com.


Melbourne
Wave pool
Surf waves could soon break in the shadow of Melbourne’s skyscrapers, if a plan to build a floating beach in Docklands takes off. According to The Age, the CBD wave pool would produce 1-to-1.5-metre barrels in the middle of Victoria Harbour, with filtered saltwater drawn from the harbour and heated all year round.

Floating off the end of Docklands’ Central Pier, the facility would also include a deep sandy beach, deck, lawn area and large beach pool. Designers say the size of the artificial waves could be adjusted, from a small swell ideal for beginners, up to a five-foot wave for experienced surfers who could ride the 30-metre-wide breaker for 160 metres.

Laneways
Melbourne’s famous laneway culture is set to become an attraction for the living as well as the dead under plans to make it a tourism hub.

Cup parade
The Race that stops a nation again stopped traffic as the annual Melbourne Cup Parade took centre stage in the CBD. According to the Herald Sun, tens of thousands of people lined Swanston St from noon to 2pm as the iconic cup was carried to Federation Square with jockeys and trainers taking part. After winning the Cup for the first time last year, trainer Gai Waterhouse was carried along Swanston St in a horse-drawn carriage.

Parking
Sydney based start-up Divvy Parking is doing what Uber and AirBnB have done for transport and accommodation, Divvy lets owners rent out their empty car spaces (long term and short term) to drivers looking for affordable parking. A large number of commercial property groups have expressed interest in using the service.

Media, multimedia & IT

Ulntranet fraud

According to The Age, West Australian Supreme Court documents show the top education executive at the company awarded the Ultranet contract in 2009 was accused by his former employer of defrauding it of more than $8,000 over a period of months. Greg Tolefe joined Ultranet developer CSG Limited in mid-2005 after the company paid $5 million to buy Mr Tolefe’s business, Cinglevue Pty Ltd, which held exclusive rights to provide US software giant Oracle’s education products.

One of Mr Tolefe’s co-owners of Cinglevue, Frank Aloisio, was a former colleague of the education department deputy secretary, Darrell Fraser, who was responsible for the Ultranet project. The education department, which is the target of the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission’s biggest investigation, is reeling. The Age revealed four of its senior investigative editors had bought shares in CSG and Mr Fraser and another top bureaucrat, Dianne Peck, accepted top jobs with the company.

Ulntranet and Catholic schools
The Education Department investigated expanding the state schools Ultranet IT system to the Catholic sector, despite the government’s consistent criticism of the project, a contract shows. According to The Age, however the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria executive director Stephen Elder said the commission had approached the government to see if the system could be adapted to its needs.

Hall of Fame
Andrew Rule, Neil Mitchell and Bruce Postle are among 31 names added on Friday night to the Melbourne Press Club’s Victorian Hall of Fame, an honour roll that now stretches across the years from Melbourne’s first newspaper publisher, John Pascoe Fawkner, to the current-day leaders of the media pack. A permanent Hall of Fame exhibition is planned at the State Library and possibly a national honour roll further down the track.

Planning
Fisherman’s Bend
The Victorian government’s rushed re-routing of the new underground rail line to Fisherman’s Bend is disrupting plans for billions of dollars of residential and commercial projects in Docklands and South Melbourne. According to The Age, developers and landowners along the proposed route between Southern Cross station and South Yarra have been notified – in some cases on the basis of strict secrecy – that the $11 billion rail route may affect major new high-rise developments, whose foundations sink deep underground.

Changes questions
According to The Age, Melbourne City Council will ask Planning Minister Matthew Guy to reverse changes he made to a Collins Street property title that enabled a developer with links to the Liberal Party to sell it for a large profit soon after.

Interventions
According to The Age, an analysis of data from the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure reveals that Minister Matthew Guy, and former planning minster Justin Madden, intervened 48 times in the inner-east cluster of suburbs. These include instances when the ministers called-in or were asked to intervene.

Residential zones overhaul
Planning Minister Matthew Guy’s revamp of Melbourne’s residential zones could be overturned if Labor wins this month’s state election, with the opposition promising a major review of the new rules. According to The Age, Mr Guy warned the review would be the first step in Labor tearing up the new zones in a bid to ‘bring back Melbourne 2030’, the controversial planning doctrine rolled out by the Bracks governments from 2002. Mr Guy has approved new planning zones for 22 of Melbourne’s 31 councils.

Musings
In The Age, Clay Lucas wrote: ‘dissatisfaction with the government’s new residential planning zones could deliver several marginal seats to Labor.’
High rise boom
According to a report in The Age, Melbourne’s high-rise boom is being dominated by second-rate buildings, according to a leading international architect expert. Professor Andrew Saint, former professor of architecture at Cambridge University, has questioned both the standard and the placement of the new towers, which are increasingly dominating the Melbourne skyline.

High rises (2)
According to The Age, Melbourne’s residential apartment boom is set to leave the central business district, Southbank and Docklands flooded with dwellings far outweighing the requirements predicted by the state government. A research project by RMIT over the past nine months has found there are about 85,000 apartments and new residences either built or in the pipeline in Melbourne’s central city area in the decade between 2011 and 2021. The government’s own Victoria in Future study, released in May, shows about 43,000 new dwellings needed for the area over the period covered by the RMIT analysis.

Resale value
According to The Age, owners are selling apartments in some Melbourne towers at substantial losses as the Victorian government approves thousands more units and the Reserve Bank cautions an oversupply risks creating a property slump in the city.

CBD residents
For 17 years many CBD residents been left in the dark over neighbouring high-rise plans. According to The Age, this could change, as Melbourne City Council and the Greens move to reinstate the rights of property owners and occupiers to be notified about adjoining building proposals. The reform is likely see a big rise in public objections about planned towers, and has already attracted critics.

The Property Council of Australia said the top priority for Melbourne’s CBD should always be business activity. ‘Providing residents with new powers to object to development is incompatible with the council’s vision for a 24-hour global city,’ Victorian executive director Jennifer Cunich said.

Bayside exemption
One of Melbourne’s richest municipalities has been given the green light by Planning Minister Matthew Guy to block any new medium-density and high-rise housing development in its residential areas. Wait for the answer to which one in the next edition!!

Cash going
A state government decision to reject expert advice to buy land early and cheaply at Fisherman’s Bend could cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars as planning authorities struggle to provide community facilities and infrastructure for the precinct. According to The Age, and the government’s plans to deliver affordable housing as part of the urban renewal project is under question after it quietly abandoned social housing plans and as property prices skyrocket.

Affordability specialist Dr Judith Stubbs, a former government housing adviser, has called for 20 per cent of new housing to be set aside to ensure lower-income Melburnians are able to live in the precinct. According to The Age, in early 2012 the state’s development agency, Places Victoria, proposed that the government buy a series of properties in Fishermans Bend for future public use. The objective was to secure sites before the precinct was rezoned, which was expected to drive up prices.

The 250-hectare industrial area sprawling from South Melbourne to Port Melbourne has been envisioned by the government as a new suburb that could house 80,000 people over the next 40 years. Places Victoria spent more than $2 million researching the area, including commissioning reports on land acquisition terms, housing affordability, employment, soil conditions and developer contributions.

In July 2012, Minister Matthew Guy rezoned the entire 250 hectares of industrial land to ‘capital city’ - the same zoning that applies to the CBD - opening the way for high-rise residential and commercial development.

Docklands plan
According to The Age, Lend Lease has submitted its plans to build a huge $600 million waterfront complex of 1070 apartments in two twin towers at Docklands on a strip of land between Collins Street and the Yarra River. The towers mark the end of development at Lend Lease’s $4.5 billion Victoria Harbour precinct. Lend Lease won the right to develop the precinct in 2001. Victoria Harbour is home to a slew of corporate tenants, including ANZ, NAB, Ericsson and Myer, and several other residential buildings housing more than 800 people.

Jeff’s Shed
The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre will be expanded to keep up with increasing demand for event space. According to the Herald Sun, the Victorian Government has entered negotiations with a private contractor to expand the facility by up to 30 per cent into the carpark area at DFO South Wharf. The nine to ten thousand square metre expansion is expected to include additional exhibition space, a new hotel, retail space and car parking.

Premier Denis Napthine said the MCEC was turning away 20 per cent of potential clients because of its lack of capacity. ‘Business events generate economic benefits of around $1.2 billion each year to Victoria,’ Dr Napthine said. He said the Government was willing to contribute up to $350 million to the expansion.

Fed Square
According to a report in The Age, ownership of Melbourne’s largest proposed public precinct, Federation Square East, is set to be handed over to a developer in the new government if the government wins re-election. It appears to be one of the most commercially favourable development agreements ever proposed for a public property, defying a tradition in which the Victorian government has retained an ownership stake in major projects such as Federation Square, CityLink and Crown Casino.

Lend Lease (2)
Lend Lease will kick off the first stages of its next major redevelopment project next year, a $1.5 billion mixed-use project in Docklands it was named after. According to the Financial Review, master plan approval was given shortly before the Victorian government went into caretaker mode ahead of the November 29 state election.

MPs
MPs have finalised nine new Precinct Structure Plans (PSPs) for the creation of progressive new suburbs in Melbourne’s growth areas, and two in Regional Victoria. The new PSPs will help guide the development of communities with a mix of housing options, access to new schools, new roads, community facilities and sports facilities. These areas will be the best served in Melbourne for public open space and walking networks, and have Melbourne’s best cycling infrastructure.

Heritage council
The ten member Heritage Council of Victoria is appointed by the Governor in Council upon the recommendation of the Planning Minister. Legal member Mary Urquhart has been appointed as Chair of the Heritage Council, replacing architect Daryl Jackson AO who retired in June after six years as Chair. Callum Fraser is director of the prominent Melbourne firm Elenberg Fraser. He is a registered architect and previous Chapter Councillor of the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA). Mr Tony Darvell has more than 35 years’ experience as a partner of law firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth. He is currently the chairman of the Audit Committee of VicRoads and deputy chairman of Linking Melbourne Authority and has previously served as chairman of VicUrban and the Werribee Park Advisory Board.

Hilton plan. Good bye.
The well-known Hilton on the Park opposite the Melbourne Convention Centre and Exhibition Centre will change its name to Pullman Melbourne on the Park after being taken over, according to a report in The Age. The US-based Hilton chain will keep a city presence with its riverfront Hilton Melbourne South Wharf and soon-to-be-opened 180-room DoubleFree by Hilton Melbourne at 270 Flinders Lane.

Youth housing
Housing Minister Wendy Lovell has pledged $6 million for non-profit organisation Kids Under Cover, which provides accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness.

Sport
Junction Oval
According to The Age, both Cricket Victoria and Cricket Australia welcomed the state opposition’s promise to inject $25 million to redevelop the historic ground to host Sheffield Shield games if it won this month’s election. The redevelopment would include modern administration, training and playing facilities for men’s and women’s cricket, new turf and restored heritage grandstands. But a proposal for the Saints to move their training base from Seafood to the club’s former heartsland at Junction Oval, mastered by AFL boss Gillon McLachlan and backed by the Victorian government, could be scrapped if Labor wins on November 29.

At the moment, the MCG belongs to cricket throughout March because there is no other first-class venue in the state, leading to a ludicrous situation that will see Victoria’s best play home games in Alice Springs this summer when the MCG is in World Cup mode.
Ballarat games
Ballarat has been showered with election promises, including AFL games and a $83 million hospital revamp, as both parties ramped up campaigning in the key battleground. According to The Age at Eureka Stadium, Bulldogs president Peter Gordon and Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews pledged that if Labor won the election the goldfields city would host at least two Western Bulldogs home games a year.

While Premier Denis Naphine promised a $65 million expansion of Ballarat Base Hospital, $10 million for a second cardiac lab, $8 million for better mental health services and a new partnership between the health service and the Royal Children’s Hospital. It is the second time Labor has tried to woo voters in the key battleground with promises of bringing AFL games to locals in the Ballarat area, which is home to three marginal seats.

Flags to be banned
The VRC and Racing Victoria dispensed with the avenue of honour at the Oaks and for the Emirates Stakes meetings in a bid to avoid a recurrence of the incident just minutes after the Melbourne Cup that led to the death of Araldo. According to The Age, the Victoria Racing Club has banned flags in horse areas for the remaining two days of the spring carnival. It’s great to have more rules… especially flag waving!

Kick back
The MCG will allow spectators to return to its hallowed turf next year for kick-to-kick after games. Melbourne Cricket Club chief executive Don Smith confirmed a breakthrough on insurance meant a ban on the traditional practice had been overcome.

Good job
A successful VFL club is looking for a CEO, careers@performancehr.com.au.

Transport – ports
Plenty o’ ships
According to the Herald Sun, a record number of cruise ships were docked in Port Phillip Bay for the Melbourne Cup Carnival. Each super cruiser spent three nights docked in Melbourne, with 130 coaches ferrying passengers from Station Pier to Flemington.

Werribee site
The market gardens south of Werribee have emerged as a prime location for Melbourne’s next big container port in new expert analysis that rejects the Victorian government’s position that the Port of Hastings is the only real option. According to The Age, the analysis, based in part on the results of recent offshore drilling in Port Phillip Bay, found a new shipping channel could be dredged to Werribee South for $1.5 billion, far less than previously estimated. The drilling was done south of Point Cook while developing the Wyndham Harbour marina, which opened in 2012.

The total cost of developing a new container port south of Werribee has been estimated at $7.9 billion in the new analysis. The full cost of developing the Port of Hastings is $16 billion including new road and rail links, according to a report for government by consulting firm GHD, completed in December. This sum is much higher than the Department of Transport’s $12 billion estimate for Bay West.

The analysis has been led by maritime engineer Gerry Byrne, a Sorrento-based former ports consultant to the World Bank; coastal and environmental consultants Water Technology, who studied the impact of the previous bay dredging on Portsea’s beaches; and construction industry consultants Rider Levett Bucknall.

Port lease
Victorian Labor looks likely to go against its infrastructure blueprint and privatise the Port of Melbourne through a medium-term lease, the same as the Coalition’s plan. According to The Financial Review, Opposition ports spokesman Natalie Hutchins said Labor was not committed to a 99-year lease and a deal would more likely be made for 40 to 50 years. The shorter period is likely to raise less money.

Transport – air
Slips up
Victorian Aviation Industry Minister Gordon Rich-Phillips has directly contradicted himself over the approach made to him by his private aero club to apply for more than $1 million from a regional infrastructure fund he oversees.

Regional rail
According to The Age, the stations are complete, the tracks are finished and it’s in good enough shape to run test trains at 160 km/h. But Victorians won’t be using the Regional Rail Link - a new rail line through Melbourne’s west started under John Brumby, largely funded by Canberra, and soon to be completed under Denis Naphine - for another six months.

Frankston promise
According to The Age, Frankston railway station and its surround will get a long awaited makeover regardless of who wins the Victorian election.

Myki scam
It is understood that credit card details stolen over the internet from people overseas have been used by the Victorian criminals to load up myki cards with those unsuspecting account holders’ money. According to the Herald Sun, the criminals then sell the fraudulently obtained mykis on the black market for a sum less than the amount stored on the card. And Public Transport Victoria is stuck with the cost of having to recompense the overseas credit card holders for the sums stolen from their accounts and put on the myki cards. According to Freedom of Information documents, PTV boss Mark Wild conceded that the scam had so far cost the organisation about $1.1 million.

Train to Tulla
According to The Age, the Coalition said the $8.5 billion to $11 billion Melbourne Rail Link, which includes the airport rail link, would ‘transform the rail network, reduce delays, improve reliability and boost capacity by up to 30 per cent’. It said ‘early works’ were expected in 2016, with construction from 2017 and the full project, including Melbourne Airport Rail Link, to be complete in 2026. The government could not say which section of the Melbourne Rail Link would be built first, the link to the airport or the rail tunnel from Southern Cross to Fisherman’s Bend and South Yarra.

It said exact timing for the opening of both sections of the project would be determined once further design and construction planning had occurred. The budget papers said the project will be completed ‘from 2026’ and contain only 2 per cent of funding in the next three years. Labor said while an airport rail link is a worthy project, it was focused on ‘the services that people use every single day’. It is prioritising building the Melbourne Metro project to increase capacity in the city loop and its plan to remove 50 level crossings.

Blame game
According to The Age, the Labour party has blamed Premier Denis Naphine for VL/Line’s failure to meet punctuality targets. The latest performance figures show nine out of eleven train lines fell short of the expected mark.

Tram network
The 75 new trams the Coalition has promised to buy in its next term will spend most of their time sitting in traffic unless a serious effort is made to speed up Melbourne’s tram network, one of the world’s slowest, a transport lobby group says. According to The Age, Melbourne’s trams have an average speed of 16km/h, dropping to just 11km/h in the CBD. Industry group Tourism & Transport Forum said the government would get more value out of its promised new trams - cost at $1.07 billion - if it made the tram network more efficient.

Myki infringements
According to The Age, most of the myki fines contested in court have been withdrawn or dismissed, amid claims the government department responsible for the problem-plagued technology is deliberately avoiding legal scrutiny. Since the system was introduced, 109 challenges to infringement notices have been heard in the Melbourne Magistrates Court, and only six people who turned up to court were fined. Another 17 who did not attend were fined.

Complaints
Complaints about the myki ticketing system remain the single highest source of cases to the Public Transport Ombudsman with an increase of almost 100 myki-related cases in the first six months of the year.

Transport – road
Contracts signed
After months of speculation and years of controversy, the government in late September signed a $5.3 billion contract with the East West Connect consortium to build the toll road. It came just hours after the High Court quashed a bid by Brunswick resident Anthony Murphy to halt signing of the contracts. According to The Age, there is a special compensation deal – a so-called “side letter” – after East West Connect threatened to walk away.

The clause means that the consortium will be no worse off financially if court cases against the road succeed. The consortium told the government it would not sign the contract without the special compensation clause.

Meanwhile...
Daniel Andrews will face rising pressure to
dump his high-risk pledge to block East West Link if he wins November’s election, after contracts for the $6.8 billion project were signed.

**Cost analysis**

Ten academics – five of whom are professors at RMIT, Monash and University of Melbourne – used the limited public information available on the project to estimate the costs to the Victorian public purse. They call for the scrapping of the toll road and redirection of funds to rail and tram tracks, new signal systems and the coordination of public transport through a new agency.

“We need to make our existing transport assets more productive. Creating loss-making assets is a terribly poor investment strategy.’ The report says the interest costs on state government borrowings alone, $77 million a year, could pay for a threefold increase in Melbourne’s smart bus services.

**Support**

According to the Herald Sun, the $16.8 billion East West Link is winning growing support as new government figures estimate it could save motorists up to 30 minutes. A positive comment on the East West Link!

**Musings**

In The Age, Josh Gordon wrote: ‘The $2 billion hit referred to by Naphine relates to the direct hit to Victoria’s budget during the construction phase. The Abbott government - read taxpayers - will chip in a further $1.5 billion, while the consortium will stump up about $3.3 billion, making a total of $6.8 billion for construction. But this is not where it ends. The consortium, led by construction giant Lend Lease, isn’t going to be spending $3.3 billion for nothing. In exchange for building, operating and maintaining the road, it will be handed a cheque from state taxpayers every three months for 25 years.’

**Gift questions**

The chief executive and senior officers at the Licences, Melbourne Authority, the agency in charge of the Victorian government’s East West Link project, received thousands of dollars in gifts and hospitality from Australia’s biggest engineering, legal and construction firms. According to The Age, the gifts have sparked calls for senior bureaucrats to be forced to declare gifts publicly, as members of Parliament must do.

**Roads and the election**

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has declared Victoria’s election a referendum on the East West Link by demanding Premier Denis Nappine announce another multi-million dollar road upgrade ahead of this month’s poll. Mr Abbott returned to Melbourne recently for a road upgrade ahead of this month’s poll. Mr O’Brien said the government had not promised another multi-million dollar pledge to finish widening the Tullamarine Freeway, which the Coalition $250 million pledge to finish widening the Tullamarine Freeway ahead of this month’s poll. Mr O’Brien returned to Melbourne recently for a road upgrade ahead of this month’s poll.

**Promises**

According to The Age, the Coalition is promising $156 million to build the Dingley bypass, and $50 million to upgrade the Great Ocean Road.

Premier Denis Naphine and Transport Minister Terry Mulder also pledged $106 million to build the 5.9 kilometre Drysdale Bypass, months after committing to a planning study in this year’s budget to fix traffic issues in the area.

**Coalition coy**

The revised business case for Melbourne’s controversial $6 billion stage one East West Link toll road may not be released before the November 29 Victorian state election. According to the Financial Review, Treasurer Michael O’Brien said the government had 90 days after the financial close of the contract, which occurred on October 3, to release an updated business case. This means the revised benefit to cost ratio (BCR) could be withheld until January 1.

Despite previously spruiking the improved BCR following the $6 billion contract signing and saying it would be published within ‘weeks’, Mr O’Brien said the government had not decided if it would release the updated business case before the election.

**Number plate gimmicks**

A Labor pledge to change Victoria’s numberplate slogan yet again if it wins the state election has been ridiculed by a road safety group. According to the Herald Sun, Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews has promised that if Labor Government would order VicRoads to change Victoria’s numberplate slogan from its current ‘Stay Alert, Stay Alive’ to the tagline ‘The Education State’. Mr Andrews said there would be a ‘minimal cost’ for the plan because the current stock of plates would be used before switching over.

The change would ‘make sure the world understands that we will make Victoria the education state’, he said. But chief executive of Road Trauma Support Services Victoria, Cameron Sinclair, said: ‘Our stance would be to keep the road safety message. A generalist comment about education doesn’t say anything.’ Premier Denis Naphine said it was appropriate that numberplates had a road safety message. He added that Mr Andrews had welcomed that comment about education doesn’t say anything.’

**Bolte widening**

Drivers are set for nearly three years of construction traffic pain as lanes are added to the Bolte Bridge, CityLink tollway and the Tullamarine and West Gate freeways in an $850 million project. According to The Age, Transurban signed a contract with the state government on Monday to widen the road from Melbourne Drive to Power Street, beginning construction in October 2015, with a completion time of early 2018. The project will include 33 kilometres of new lanes.

**Late-night revellers**

The rank will be trialled until the end of January and Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said he hoped it would be as successful as the Queen St rank, which catered for more than 1000 passengers recently.

**Taxi numbers**

According to The Age. Labor will create a $4 million hardship fund for disadvantaged taxi licence owners and limit the number of taxi licences that can be issued, to stop a flood of taxis hitting the road, the Opposition promised.

**Cyclists**

According to the Herald Sun, Victoria Police figures reveal the number of red-light runners nabbed jumped by 30 per cent to 900 in 2013-14, compared to 682 the previous year. Melbourne’s CBD was the hot spot followed by Yarra and Moreland, which have popular cycle routes throughout Richmond, Clifton Hill, Fitzroy, Coburg and Brunswick. Cyclists face the same fines as drivers for running red lights and are penalised $369.

Motorists also incur three demerit points for running a red light but because cyclists do not have licences, they avoid losing the points. Those caught riding without a helmet are fined $185.

**Bike money**

According to The Age, Labor has promised to spend $100 million over six years to create a network of paths for cyclist and pedestrians, to reduce death and injury on the roads.

**Morning bike path**

According to the Herald Sun, cyclists will be able to ride from the city to Mornington Peninsula on a dedicated bike path as part of a $70 million plan for the East West Link. The Victorian government announced details of 15km of pedestrian initiatives to accompany the project.

**Rego instamals**

According to the Herald Sun, a push for millions of Victorians to be able to pay costly car registration in instalments has accelerated. The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce is campaigning for an election commitment to make it easier to pay off the annual fee, which from July rose to a record $757.70 for an average family sedan in Melbourne.

**Struggling to move**

According to the Geelong Independent, Geelong is buckling under traffic congestion and crowded public transport, an RACV report has found. The report, Growing Pains in Regional Victoria, called for whichever party won government at the state election to guarantee duplication of the Princes Hwy through Colac. Brian Negus from the RACV said the priority list for Geelong included duplication of Barwon Heads Road, a new bike path on Marshall Road and Midland Highway and a $70 million plan for the East West Link. The Victorian government announced details of 15km of pedestrian initiatives to accompany the project.

**Clearways**

According to the Herald Sun, drivers are having their cars towed within minutes of Melbourne streets being declared clearways. Almost 100 vehicles are towed every week from 13 clearways in the City of Melbourne, raking in almost $2.3 million in fines and fees.
Cheapest fuel
Melbourne had the cheapest petrol of the nation’s major capitals from late August to late September. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Mulgrave, Doncaster and Box Hill regions averaged the city’s cheapest unleaded fuel prices in the past month.

Car crashes
Two of Melbourne’s busiest freeways were closed for several hours recently. The Monash Freeway was shut for four hours after a motorcyclist died, and traffic diverted onto local roads. The freeway carries 155,000 cars a day, with one in ten of these vehicles a truck.

Utilities
Not one drop
According to The Age, new accounts filed by the consortium in charge of the desalination plant, Aquasure Pty Ltd, show the Victorian government paid $254.34 million in “operational water service revenue” during the 2014 financial year. Operational water service revenue is a payment made by the government for simply having the desalination plant available, regardless of whether it is used, and the 2014 payment was substantially higher than the $133 million paid in the 2013 financial year. The consortium also received $383 million in other fees during the 2014 financial year, which were described as ‘repayments’ of a service concession.

The figures were revealed in documents filed to the corporate regulator in recent days, and suggest slightly more has been paid to Aquasure than the $630.4 million that was suggested earlier this year. The desalination plant was commissioned at the height of the drought by the Bracks Labor government in 2007, and the final construction milestone was achieved later than scheduled in October 2013. Improved rainfall and a change in government have ensured that the plant has never produced water for Melbourne, aside from test volumes that were pumped into Melbourne’s dams to prove the plant’s competence.

OLV (The kept Secret)
The architect of the Victorian Coalition’s urban water policies, Peter Coombes, is no longer the government’s chief scientist. According to The Age, the Victorian government and Dr Coombes mutually agreed to terminate his two-year contract in late September. The decision has not been publicly announced. It represents the final act in the dismantling of the agency established by Water Minister Peter Walsh in 2012 and charged with revolutionising Victoria’s water sector.

Walsh, who had engaged Dr Coombes to help draft the Coalition’s water policies before overseeing his appointment as chief scientist, gave the OLV enormous power and autonomy to change the way in which Victorians use and pay for water.

Adoption rights
Welfare agency Berry Street - which receives funding from the state government - is just one organisation that pitches a tent to hand out brochures and encourage gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) people to consider becoming foster parents. According to The Age yet, unlike heterosexuals, GLBTI foster parents are not allowed to adopt their foster children, even if they have legally become their permanent carers and looked after them for many years.

In fact, gay Victorians are not able to adopt at all, something that sets them apart from other jurisdictions such as NSW, ACT, Tasmania and Western Australia. Before the state election all parties have been quick to spruik their queer credentials to hold on to valuable marginal seats such as Prahran. Labor and the Greens have policies that support same-sex adoption. But there is no clear sign that the Coalition is ready to declare its position, despite vigorous support for GLBTI issues from Prahran MP Clem Newton-Brown.

White Ribbon problems
A men’s rights group has been accused of ‘hijacking’ the name of a prominent anti-domestic violence group and is using it to publish “misinformation” about violence against women. White Ribbon is considering taking legal action to stop the group, which uses the same name and similar branding.

White Ribbon Australia is an anti-violence organisation that appoints high-profile men to make a public stance against violence and encourage other men to do the same. According to The Age, the alleged fake website is owned and operated by A Voice for Men, which claims on its own website to ‘expose misandry on all levels in our culture’ and to ‘educate men and boys about the threats they face in feminist governance and to promote an end to that governance.’

Vale

Any subscriber who would like a complimentary copy of the Australian Constitution, please let us know.

A Reflection on Australia. Let us look at Gordon Reserve in Spring Street, Melbourne. Two statues. Adam Lindsay Gordon one of Australia’s great poets, who died at Brighton 23 years before Australia became a nation and General Gordon of Khartoum who was one of the icons of the British Empire who was killed in Africa in 1885, and known to every Australian schoolchild until about the late 1950’s. (Photo Lindsay Gordon).

As an Australian school boy off to Washington DC on a student exchange programme in 1964, I was issued with my British passport (British subject and Australian citizen). It amused my American friends. My next passport in 1972 was still a British passport (Australian citizen).

Retrospective legislation in 1941, declared that Australia was independent from Britain as from 8 December 1939. However, British laws and legal system remain around us in reality and as precedent, with some important changes sometimes such as appeals from the High Court of Australia, no longer going to Britain’s House of Lords in the 1970’s.

Do not forget the Australian aborigine. Never forget their law and government influence if these issues might be relevant. Planning law for starters. More important in some regions of Australia than others.

1788 and the laws of one colony, though mainly the laws of Britain, which covered all of the land that is now Australia. Education and everything else. And then Tasmania, for the naughty guys.

Victoria was freed from the New South Wales colony in 1851, with New South Wales keeping the river to the southern bank which became the Victorian border.

Other private sector colonies became established in Adelaide in 1836, Perth or WA in 1829, and Brisbane in 1859 or thereabouts. (This is a pretty quick summary of a lot of arguments.)

Then 1901, the six colonies came together. The debate had taken 20 years. WA signed up at the last moment, just about when New Zealand withdrew from the final document.

To form one nation, six states and two territories (the Northern Territory, because SA did not have the substance and ambition to have that northern part), and the constitutional compromise, the ACT, copying the American model which carved DC out of Maryland and Virginia.

The Australian nation was to have a capital city carved out of one state at least 100 miles from the oldest colony of Sydney and in the general direction of wealthy Melbourne/the colony of Victoria. And out of naval bombardment range of international competitors such as France. And also as a part of the compromise, to have the capital in Melbourne until they built a parliament house in Canberra, and borrow the very significant Victorian parliament house until this happened in 1927.) I mention this national capital detail so that you are aware why you are on that plane to Canberra.

As the new Commonwealth government was being formed, yet another level of government was created as each of the states established their own local government act. Hence the third main level of government. Just watch out which hand you might be trying to get a feed from, avoid or otherwise get to understand.

The new Commonwealth was given several very clear powers, in particular defence, foreign affairs, customs and aviation. The rest were the powers of the states unless the Commonwealth could pull a power out of it’s pocket. Unlike Canada..

The Premier’s Conference, seeking to coordinate their states’ approach to education or other sectors, invited the prime minister over the years. This gave way to the Council Of Australian Governments, COAG, in 1991. Which clearly expresses how the Commonwealth government now often pulls the punches when it gets to a debate over which is more influential.

The Commonwealth also uses it’s Budget in education (or any of the other policy areas) to give money directly to local government. The national or federal government does not always get it’s way. The Commonwealth had grabbed income and corporate tax powers during the second World War.

Now, be aware of government agencies. Just check out there legal structure. Sometimes the name does not make this clear. The Murray Darling Basin Commission, now the MDBA brings together four states and the Commonwealth government.

Over the years, we have had federally funded agencies which were regionally focused, not state or local, but these have one passed on, mostly.

SO BEWARE. You will better respect government, which you need to do, by understanding it. And you will make your pitch appropriately.

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