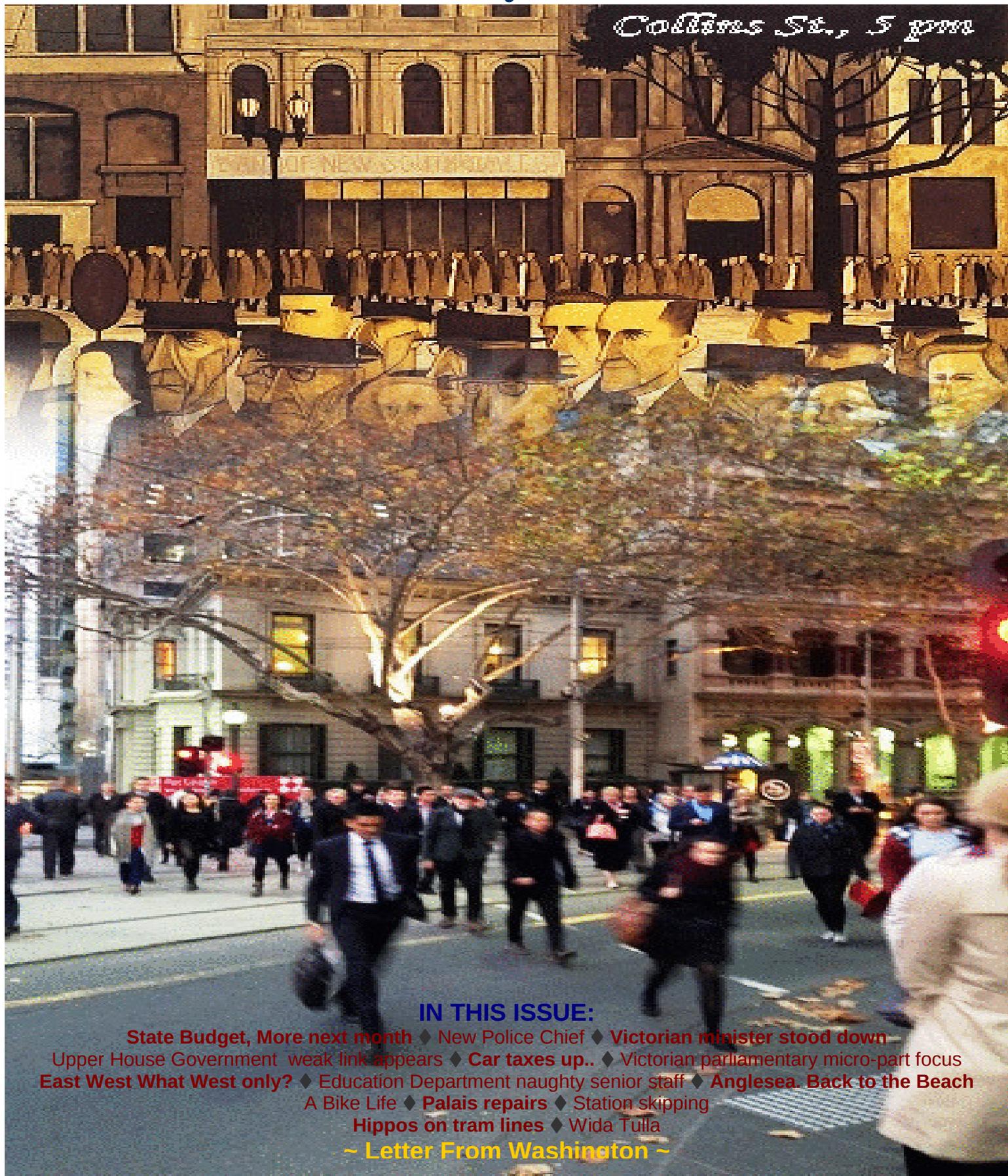


# LETTER FROM MELBOURNE

A monthly public affairs bulletin, a simple précis, distilling and interpreting public policy and government decisions, which effect business opportunities in Victoria and Australia.  
Every month for more than twenty years.

## Post Budget Edition



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- ~ **Letter From Washington** ~

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Letter From Melbourne is a monthly public affairs bulletin, a simple précis, distilling and interpreting public policy and government decisions, which affect business opportunities in Victoria and Australia.

Written for the regular traveller, or people with meeting-filled days, it's more about business opportunities than politics.

Letter from Melbourne is independent. It's not party political or any other political. It does not have the imprimatur of government at any level. Letter from Melbourne developed a federal and national coverage. This spawned Letter from Canberra (www.letterfromcanberra.com.au) four years ago.

The only communication tool of its type, Letter from Melbourne keeps subscribers abreast of recent developments in the policy arena on a local, state and federal level.

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# Letter from Melbourne

Since 1994. A monthly public affairs newsletter distilling public policy and government decisions which effect business opportunities in Victoria, Australia and beyond. 2,000,000 words available to search digitally.

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**About the editor**

*Alistair Urquhart, BA LLB*

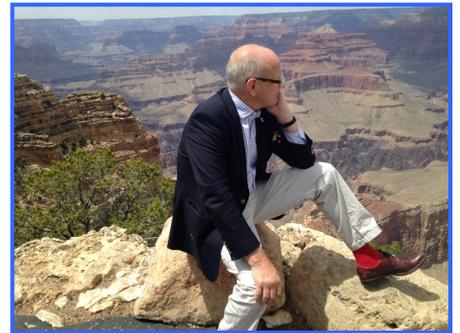
Alistair Urquhart graduated from the Australian National University in Canberra, in Law, History and Politics. He may even hold the record for miles rowed on Lake Burley Griffin.

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.



The Editor Ponders, Grand Canyon, Arizona

**About the publisher**

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## Editorial

### Following the Facts

In the good old days, we gathered a few friends or neighbours for an evening around the tele to watch the Budget, State or federal. Those days are past now and, perhaps, in the past, they will remain. We know most of the Budget secrets, which have been tested in the media, in the community, even elsewhere, in the weeks and days beforehand. Hence, your editor, hot off the plane from a quick four week trip around the United States, and KL for a very powerful Company Director's Conference, is still absorbing some of these budget details. In the meantime, note Letter From Washington in this edition.

In the last edition, the Editor used eleven articles on one day from the Herald-Sun from which we dredged facts, and ideas, and opinions. Returning from the US several days ago, I was reading *The Age* and got to page thirteen before I found any article that I found in anyway positive for me. As a part of our commitment to an objective publication, all Victorian Government press releases appear on my screen as they are released. This will sharpen up some of the Facts from the Government's perspective. Also, we are programming in references to a wide range of professional, industry and community publications.

Next Issue out in a fortnight to make up for some lost time and to finesse the Budget details.

Cover: With due respect to John Brack, 'Collins Street 5pm' oil on canvass, National Gallery of Victoria. Winter is a great time o visit that Gallery and have a coffee as well.

## State Government and Politics

### Minister stood aside

Premier Andrews said the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade Adem Somyurek's chief of staff approached the Premier's office with concerns about the Minister's behaviour. The Minister has been stood down and there will be a full inquiry, run by the secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The Premier said he would act as the Small Business Minister whilst Samyurek was stood down. There is evidently behind-the-scenes activitiy within Australian Labour Party factions. Labor's grip has been weakened on the Victorian upper house while Adem Somyurek is investigated for bullying. Watch this space,

### Stop Rush Jobs

Future Victorian governments could be prevented from signing contracts on major

infrastructure projects within three months of an election, under new laws designed to avoid a repeat of the stoush over the East-West Link. As Premier Daniel Andrews finalises the provisional settlement for the abandoned road project, Treasurer Tim Pallas told Fairfax Media the current caretaker period – which starts 25 days before polling day – is not enough to prevent multi-billion-dollar projects from being rushed through before an election.

### Security Beefed Up

Sections of the Victorian Parliament have been strengthened to resist bomb impacts, gates have been redesigned to prevent unauthorised entry and security protocols have been beefed up, in a bid to protect the building from terror threats, as reported in *The Age*. A routine review of security began two years ago, partly informed by two separate attacks that had taken place on the front steps: the assault of a protective services officer, and a scuffle between taxi drivers and then Frankston MP Geoff Shaw.

However, that review was ramped up when the terror alert was raised, with \$8.5 million worth of resources allocated as part of the last two budgets.

### Big Rewards for Allies

Blessed with surging property tax revenue and the unspent capital from the cancelled East-West Link, the Victorian government has ploughed billions into state schools, TAFEs and hospitals. But voters have been left with little clarity around the full funding model for the \$9-\$11 billion Metro Rail project and Labor's hopes to raise more than \$5 billion through the sale of the Port of Melbourne. Treasurer Tim Pallas's first budget aims to address the structural change in the Victorian economy as automotive manufacturing in the state winds down.

Loosely defined plans for a \$500 million Premier's Jobs and Investments Panel, and a \$500 million regional jobs and infrastructure fund, show that the government intends taking a far more interventionist role in the Victorian economy than its predecessor had done. Treasury forecasts and commentary in the budget paint a picture of a gradually recovering economy that, nevertheless, remains vulnerable to shocks.

There was little comfort for business, which remains wary of the state government after the East-West Link cancellation. As reported in *The Australian*, there were no payroll tax cuts, nor were there any WorkCover premium decreases.

### Surplus Budget Slashed

The Victorian government announces a write-down in this year's budget surplus from an expected \$1.1 billion to \$900 million, and it will revise down by half the projected surpluses over the next three years. In Labor's first budget since it was elected last November, projected operating surpluses have been revised down to \$5.8 billion, but net debt is projected to fall from 5.8 per cent of gross state product this financial year to 4.4 per cent by 2018-2019 according to the *Financial Review*.

If the government is forced to repay the \$1.5 billion given by the federal government for the East-West Link, a budget deficit of \$700 million could be expected this financial year.

### Commission Dysfunction

Last year the Victorian Public Sector Commission (formerly the State Services Authority) found that the Commission for Young People had a negative culture and high levels of staff dissatisfaction. *The Age* announced that the report warned of the need for serious overhauling, including hiring staff with varied expertise, and without such measures the CYP would struggle to cope with additional roles arising from the government's response to the *Betrayal of Trust* report into child abuse.

### Secret Metro Sting

Train and tram fare rises, a CBD parking additional tax, car registration increases, a road toll premium and a one-off rates lift: all of these things are recommended in a 321-page Cabinet in Confidence document, prepared for the previous administration in 2011, which underpins the ambitious plan to build the Melbourne Metro Rail tunnel. According to the Herald Sun, the \$11 billion project linking Footscray to Caulfield via the CBD will be financed by \$1 billion from the federal government and an expected \$6 billion from the sale of the Port of Melbourne.

### Shorten Reforms Defied

Federal Labor leader Bill Shorten has

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suffered a setback in his home state of Victoria, with the party conference in Victoria voting down his preferred '70-30' reforms to reduce union power in ALP preselections. Delegates from the Opposition Leader's own union – the Australian Workers Union – voted against the proposals to increase the weighting of rank-and-file members in preselection contests from 50 to 70 per cent.

But members of the Shorten camp told The Australian that he had emerged from the conference with a clear win on his other main issue – giving members a 50 per cent say in leadership ballots – and in addition, his push to end mandatory union membership for ALP members looked set to succeed at the national conference.

### **The Missing Link**

Once the envy of the nation, Victoria's management of major transport projects and private-public partnerships has degenerated into farce, writes Ben Potter in a full-page opinion piece in the Financial Review on page 52 on Thursday, May 7.

### **Multicultural Moves On**

Victorian Multicultural Commissioner Chin Tan has resigned, and is in talks with the state government about his departure. Mr Tan, a former Liberal preselection candidate, was given the top cultural diversity job by former premier Ted Baillieu in 2011. He is a lawyer, a co-chair of the Police and Community Multicultural Advisory Committee, and a member of Victoria Police's Human Rights Strategic Advisory Committee.

### **Eradicate the Micro Party**

Victoria's voting laws could be overhauled to stem the tide of micro-parties who get elected to parliament with a tiny proportion of the vote, according to The Age. Six months after the state election – in which several micro-parties won coveted spots in the Upper House – Liberal and Labor insiders are considering voting reforms. Those reforms, if implemented, would force candidates to meet a higher threshold of first-preference votes than is now the case, before they could be

elected.

The proposal was one of seven passed at the recent Liberal State Council, with proponents of it having argued that the results of the November election produced distorted outcomes.

### **Labor does the Time Warp Again**

According to James Campbell in the Herald Sun, many of the Victorians who elected Daniel Andrews last year probably thought they were voting for a return of the Steve Bracks and John Brumby governments. Now, almost four months after he was elected Premier, it is clearer that Mr Andrews is a much more left-wing beast than the last two ALP Premiers were, and not afraid to show it. Since coming to office the new government has – in no particular order – sacked the CEO of WorkSafe, the board of Ambulance Victoria, abolished the Linking Melbourne Authority and scrapped every water board in the state.

It has repealed the previous government's move on laws designed to break pickets at labour disputes, and has abolished the Liberals' construction code, which limited the CFMEU's ability to operate on building sites with down-payments on large pay increases to members of the paramedics' union. Finally, the scrapping of a private hospital inside the new Victorian Cancer Centre is pure and simple left-wing ideology.

### **Get a Grip on Gripes**

Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass said her job was to look at complaints made about state public services, but this offer often attracted gripes about anything. To make it simpler for people to register legitimate complaints, Ms Glass is seeking state government funding to set up a one-stop shop, through a special website, for all issues involving Victorian public agencies. Last year, according to the Herald Sun, the Ombudsman received more than 13,000 relevant complaints, most involving the justice system, local councils and human services.

## **Federal**

### **I Want My Money**

Treasurer Joe Hockey is drafting a letter demanding the Victorian government give back the \$1.5 billion which it pocketed before it axed the East-West Link. The letter is expected to accuse the state government of breaching the terms of the National Partnership Agreement under which the funding was provided. The money has so far earned \$30 million in interest, as reported in the Herald Sun.

### **Gonski on Life Support**

According to Josh Gordon in The Age, 20 months after Victoria signed the historic Gonski agreement to dramatically overhaul school funding, the new system is in danger of collapsing. The new model, based on the 2011 report by David Gonski, explicitly linked basic funding to student numbers, before adding extra cash to tackle disadvantages such as remoteness, disability and poverty. The former state government signed up to the deal with the Commonwealth in August 2013. Under the agreement, Victoria would chip in \$5.4 billion and the Commonwealth \$6.8 billion, producing a total of \$12.2 billion over six years.

Then politics intervened. Instead of committing to the full six years of the agreement, the newly elected federal government refused to provide any funding certainty beyond the first four years. This was significant, given that the final two years of the initial deal (2018 and 2019) contained more than half (58 per cent) of the Commonwealth's expected total contribution to Victoria. For 2017, \$1.664 billion was allocated, making a total of \$2.891 billion. This suggests a shortfall of \$805 million in 2016 and 2017.

### **East West Revival**

Melbourne will get a vital second river crossing, under a \$5.5 billion toll road plan proposed by infrastructure giant Transurban, reviving part of the canned East-West Link. The Financial Review reports that Transurban has entered negotiations with the Victorian government

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and signed a letter of intent to build the Western Distributor road project, which follows a similar route to the controversial \$10 billion East West stage two plan.

But, but, but, Premier Daniel Andrews' stand-off with Prime Minister Tony Abbott looks set to deepen, what with the federal government warning Mr Andrews that it would not guarantee funding for the project, because the Commonwealth was yet to see a business case and Victoria was yet to commit its own funding. Transurban chief Scott Charlton said that the project would be funded a third from federal government money, a third from tolls and one-third from extending Transurban's CityLink concession deed from 2035 to 2050.

## Agriculture

### *Our countryside*

The state government is facing a tough battle to pass its bill to ban grazing in several national parks, with many of the Upper House cross-benchers who will determine the bill's fate telling Fairfax Media that they remain undecided on how they will vote. This proposed ban follows a decade-long battle over cattle grazing in Victoria's Alpine National Park. The practice was originally halted in 2005, then reinstated by the Ted Baillieu government under a three-year 'scientific trial', which, the government argued at the time, would test whether grazing reduced the risk of bushfires.

Although Environment Minister Lisa Neville canned the trial when Labor returned to power last year, she is pushing legislation to put a formal ban upon future cattle grazing in the alpine park for any purpose. That ban would also extend to the River Red Gum national parks along the Murray, Goulburn and Ovens rivers. With the opposition almost certain to vote against the proposal, and the Greens to vote for the legislation, the government needs to win the support of the Shooters and Fishers or that of two other cross-benchers.

## Arts

### *Forget Florence*

As part of a \$20 million package, Victoria's Creative Industries Minister Martin Foley announced funding for the Regional Centre of Culture program, loosely modelled on Europe's 30-year-old City of Culture program. From 2018, this would be a year-long celebration focussed on one region, to attract tourism and develop a lasting artistic legacy.

It will see major exhibitions and performances from metropolitan galleries and companies which tour regional Victoria. As reported in The Age, Regional Arts Victoria director Esther Anatolitis says she is delighted with the package, which includes a commitment to her own organisation's Small Town Transformations project.

### *What is the role of History?*

As reported in the Herald Sun, the National Gallery of Victoria and the state government have been accused of gross insensitivity for hosting an exhibition for Russian artworks amid Vladimir Putin's intervention in Ukraine. The NGV's Winter Masterpieces show will feature art acquired by Russia's Catherine the Great, who expanded the country in the 18th century. Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations president Stefan Romaniv said the show was particularly insensitive to the families of the 38 Australians, including 18 Victorians, who died in last year's plane crash, for which pro-Putin elements were widely blamed. IT'S ON IN JULY.

During her long reign from 1729 to 1796, Catherine spearheaded the Russian enlightenment and established the St Petersburg's Hermitage: bigger than the Louvre in Paris.

### *Love at First Bite*

A new artwork at Federation Square pays homage to a uniquely Melbourne phenomenon, and it has got nothing to do with coffee, street art or laneways. Sculptor Kathy Holowko's installation Batmania celebrates the city's fruit bat

colony, which she sees as an iconic part of Melbourne. According to The Age, Ms Holowko has created 200 life-sized bats which have now been hung inside Federation Square's Atrium.

## Education

### *Unsupported Kids Struggling*

One-sixth of the students in Victorian schools have been diagnosed with a disability, mental health issue or learning disorder, dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The official data, provided to The Australian by state and territory education departments, reveals an alarming rise in the number of students diagnosed with intellectual or learning disabilities.

The federal government's first budget last year gave a commitment to funding schools, using the needs-based model proposed by businessman David Gonski until the end of next year. It is now under pressure to extend that concept for at least two more years.

### *Teacher Barred from Class*

A teacher who allegedly let students play knife games, and failed to supervise a student who set fire to a book in class, has been barred from teaching. George Steele worked at Mill Park Secondary College for three terms in 2013 and was the subject of 49 formal complaints at that time. They were detailed in a decision handed down by the Victorian Institute of Teaching, which found that Mr Steele had engaged in misconduct and cancelled his registration in March as reported in The Age.

### *How sad*

Explosive emails showing Victorian education officials using taxpayer money meant for schools like a personal bank account have been tendered to a corruption hearing. The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission alleges that high-ranking Education Department staff milked the public purse through a 'systematic' creation of false invoices, often paid by 'banker schools'. According to the Herald Sun, these were schools which, in line with departmental

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practice, held money on behalf of the department for school projects and sometimes for departmental expenses.

### **Skills Hit Rock Bottom**

Figures show that 2,500 qualifications were withdrawn within the state government's first 100 days, according to the Victorian Qualifications Authority – on top of 7,000 recalled last year in order to fix the controversial funding system, created so that more students could end up with jobs. In a bid to force institutions to lift their game, The Age reports that the government will also embark on the largest survey ever recorded for the vocational sector, involving more than 220,000 students from 517 organisations. The survey will identify gaps in course quality and provide a comprehensive snapshot into the performance of individual private providers and TAFEs – data never thoroughly accessed before.

## **Environment and Conservation**

### **Pet Police**

The RSPCA will be given \$5 million for a flying squad of inspectors to crack down on illegal puppy and kitten farms. The money will also be used for data collection and for the care of animals seized. State Agriculture Minister Jaala Pulford said that the funds, to be distributed over four years, were in addition to the \$1 million a year the RSPCA receives in government support.

### **Campsite Fee Axed**

Campers were given an early Easter gift in 2015, with Environment Minister Lisa Neville announcing that 536 campsites at 70 camping grounds had been axed. The former state government introduced a \$13 fee for basic campsites, as well as increases to fees for other types of camping grounds in national parks, in a bid to boost maintenance. The booking system for basic sites, which are un-serviced, and have either a pit toilet or no toilet, will also be phased out by July 1.

Parks Victoria has also been asked to review the fee structure for other camp grounds to see if this structure is fair, and whether it would affect visitor numbers. The Age reports that the previous state government cut \$88 million from the Parks Victoria budget since 2011.

## **Events**

### **It's the Law**

Protestors who shut down the central city for three hours vow it won't be the last time they cause peak-hour commuter chaos. For the second time in three weeks, hundreds of thousands of people trying to get home were severely inconvenienced as an angry throng of more than 12,000 people jammed the streets. Protestors want Western Australia to dump a plan to strip back support for remote Aboriginal Communities, and the federal government

to do more to support Indigenous Australians.

The fight comes despite WA Premier Colin Barnett's suggestion that a 'hub and orbit' strategy would leave some communities larger and better resourced, and the Northern Territory government's announcement of a 10-year strategy to boost education in the Outback. The rally, organised by the Warriors of Aboriginal Resistance, will shift to a temporary camp at Kings Domain for the next two days.

### **Ban Anzac Auctions**

The Real Estate Institute of Victoria joined with its NSW counterpart in calling on their members not to hold auctions on the Anzac weekend. About 85,000 people attended Anzac Day services at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance and elsewhere, with similarly high attendance rates in Sydney. According to the Financial Review, some auctioneers acknowledged the significance of the day, reminding buyers and onlookers of its significance and calling for a minute's silence before starting bidding.

### **Fume at Flag Burning**

The burning of the Australian flag came as simultaneous rallies by anti-Islam and anti-racism protestors descended into assaults and chaos in Melbourne. Rallies by the Reclaim Australia movement were organised in 16 cities and protested against Islamic extremism. According to the Herald Sun, the Rally Against Racism protest was organised in response to the event, with more than 100 police officers needed to keep the brawling crowds apart in Melbourne.

## **Gaming**

### **Casino debts Crime Link**

Vietnamese women jailed in record numbers for drug offences say that they turned to crime to pay gambling debts incurred at Crown Casino. More than one-third of all people banned from the casino by police are believed to be Vietnamese, including some convicted of money laundering and drug offences. As part of the Swinburne University research, Roslyn Le interviewed almost every Vietnamese woman serving a Victorian prison sentence for a drug offence. She found that in 2011, about one in five women had to pay 10 per cent interest every week on their loans.

## **Health**

The Fertility Control Clinic started Supreme Court action against Melbourne City Council last year, claiming it has continuously failed to apply a law that allows protestors who were deemed a 'nuisance' to be moved away. Counsel for the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Kate Eastman SC, said that protestors harassing women and staff should be deemed a nuisance to

public health under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act, which defends the rights of people to access legal health services.

Members of Helpers of God's Precious Infants hold protests outside the Wellington Parade building in East Melbourne six days a week, and a religious service once a month. They have for several years been accused of intimidating patients and staff, blocking their entry to and from cars, yelling at and following women down streets. In 2001, a security guard was murdered by an anti-choice protester.

### **Dry Melbourne, Thirsty Venues**

The former Brumby government introduced a freeze on late night liquor licences in 2008 to curb alcohol-fuelled violence in the city, which was extended by the Napthine government. Crime data shows that the rate of assault and related offences is trending down in the Melbourne local government area.

Meanwhile, operators with late licences benefit from the lack of competition while their licences grow in value. Robert Doyle, Melbourne Mayor and former Liberal opposition leader, is in favour of the freeze, although the government remains tight-lipped on what it will do come June 30. The new minister for Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Jane Garrett, is considering an independent report on the freeze.

### **Codeine Without a Script**

Doctors who specialise in treating pain have called for the national drug regulator to ban sales of medications containing codeine without a doctor's prescription. The Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists has made a submission to the Therapeutic Goods Administration, which Fairfax Media has revealed was assessing the drug's status. Faculty dean Ted Shipton said that the low levels of codeine in over-the-counter medications meant they were not very effective in what they were meant to do, as well as carrying high potential for addiction and harm.

### **Hospital Beds Empty**

One in 10 hospital beds are not being used, a review into the state's hospital capacity has found. The interim report of the review, commissioned by the ALP while in opposition, found that 1,436 of 13,981 useable inpatient beds were empty. More than one-fifth of beds at Barwon Health were vacant earlier this year, as were 19 per cent of the beds at Eastern Health and 13 per cent at Western Health.

The review was carried out by the Australian Medical Association's former Victoria president Doug Travis, who surveyed the state's 86 public services. Among 15 recommendations in the review, Dr Travis urged more detailed reporting on

the average waiting time to clear waiting lists, and on the time it takes to see specialists to be referred from surgery.

### **Vaccine Makes Impact**

The cervical cancer vaccine has halved the rate of cancerous abnormalities in girls aged under 20 to the lowest levels in recent history, according to the Herald Sun. Abnormality rates in women aged 20-24 have also plunged 23 per cent since the introduction of the vaccine. The latest data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that the historical peak age of the abnormalities has shifted as a result, from ages 20-24 to 25-29.

### **Risk of Measles**

Measles has been officially eliminated within Australia, but NSW Health says that the sheer frequency of international travel means the condition is being imported into the state at least once a month, putting children who are not fully immunised at risk. It considers the threat so serious that it is rolling out a state-wide booster program to children in their senior years of high school.

Australia's relatively high overall rate of measles immunisations masks the dangers at a local level, where analysis from the National Centre of Immunisation Research and Surveillance for Vaccine Preventable Diseases has found that immunisation rates are well below the minimum requirement that 95 per cent of six-year old children should have at least one measles vaccination. In Victoria, the Yarra Valley is at 77 per cent, while Melbourne City is 55 per cent and Southbank is 67 per cent, although there were difficulties with data in the last two areas.

### **Victoria: The Place to Be**

The Royal Melbourne Hospital, Sunshine Hospital, the Northern Hospital, Western Hospital, Dandenong Hospital and Maroondah hospital all provided care at costs 20 per cent lower than the national average, according to the National Health Performance Authority survey. But it also found that in the most expensive hospitals, some procedures cost nearly four times more. The report compared the average cost per admission for 16 conditions and procedures at 80 public hospitals.

Holistic View Needed for Medical Precinct Health Minister Jill Hennessy says that, as a public facility, 'not one inch' of the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre should be set aside for private health care; all the space inside the new centre must be for public treatment and research. However, it is not as clear-cut as this, in view of the fact that public hospitals often treat private patients (and are reimbursed by health insurance companies), and that consultants attached to public hospitals also treat patients in private facilities. Ms Hennessy, though, says that the

government is open to proposals that might lead to a big private hospital being built in the Parkville precinct, one with hundreds of beds that might cater to all types of ailments.

### **Cancer Centre Bickering**

The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre clashed with the state government over branding at its new Parkville home, as the Herald Sun revealed that a heads of agreement between Peter Mac and a private operator for 42 beds at the new Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre had been scrapped. Peter Mac chair Wendy Harris, QC, warned that the decision may cost \$20 million in philanthropic donations that were conditional on having private facilities. Harris has stepped down. How sad.

The Herald Sun understands that the private beds decision was viewed internally as another snub of the Peter Mac board, after a decision to relegate its branding to street level at the new VCCC. The hospital had wanted 'sky level signage', arguing that having such signage was important for its profile, and that it would be occupying 90 per cent of the new facility to be opened next year.

But the government said that because there were multiple organisations involved in the \$1 billion centre, the overarching logo of the VCCC was more appropriate. Opposition spokeswoman Mary Wooldridge accused Mr. Andrews of political interference. 'I am concerned he is not doing the right thing by Peter Mac and Victorians'. But Health Minister Jill Hennessy said the words 'Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre' will be front and centre on top of the main entrance.

## **Business / Investment**

### **Thanks for the Sun**

The Anglesea coal mine and electricity generator in western Victoria will be shut down after its owners, Alcoa, failed to find a buyer for it. The closure was widely anticipated after Alcoa closed its Point Henry aluminium smelter in Geelong last August, leaving the Anglesea plant to struggle on as an independent supplier in the wholesale power market. It comes as another blow to the western Victorian economy which has been hit by the closure of Alcoa's Point Henry smelter, uncertainty during the sale of the shell refinery and job losses at Target and Qantas.

The area is also bracing for the impact of the departure of the car-maker Ford, which will cease operations next year, with hundreds of direct and indirect jobs expected to be lost, according to the Financial Review. Victoria's electricity market is suffering from oversupply after a downturn in demand and an increase in rooftop solar.

### **Tenant Trouble Looms**

The shakeout in retailing from the arrival of the Emporium Melbourne is likely to continue for years, as the city's newest centre jostles for key tenants with rival retail hub Melbourne Central. The two major shopping malls, which form a consumer mecca stretching from Lonsdale to Bourke streets, share up to 44 tenants, including key brands like Armani Exchange, Arthur Galan, Hype DC and Scanlon & Theodore. According to The Age, Melbourne Central has spent \$1.5 million on revamping its Lonsdale Street frontage and also bolted on another small property at 202 Little Lonsdale Street in mid-2014 for \$4.8 million.

### **Business Plea for Help**

The Master Builders Association of Victoria has warned that short and medium-term infrastructure projects are urgently needed to offset the loss of jobs and investment triggered by the decision to dump the East-West Link. The May 5 state budget is viewed as crucial to restore business confidence. In The Age, the Australian Industry Group has also called for a 'bold, game-changing first budget' to tackle sluggish demand, slower jobs growth and the end of automotive manufacturing.

### **Going, Going, Gone**

The number of foreign buyers of new Australian homes tripled last financial year, a new report from the Foreign Investment Review Board shows. China is by far the biggest foreign purchaser of Australian real estate, splurging \$12.4 billion in 2013-14. Foreign buyers view Australian real estate as a safe haven and education is often the prime motivation for purchases. In March, Treasurer Joe Hockey said the forced sale of the \$39 million mansion Villa del Mare, in Sydney's Point Piper, purchased by one of China's richest men in November, was because it was sold in contravention of the existing foreign ownership laws.

### **Chinese Increase Prices**

From a recent Herald Sun report, it emerged that Glen Waverley and Mount Waverley are the most popular suburbs in Australia for Chinese buyers. Local agents say among the attractions are two of Victoria's best public schools, Glen Waverley Secondary College and Mt Waverley Secondary College, along with two of Melbourne's best private schools, Wesley College and Caulfield Grammar. Biggin & Scott Glen Waverley director Ming Xu said that the established Asian community in Glen Waverley and Mt Waverley was also a huge drawcard for Chinese buyers.

### **Drivers to be Compensated**

Professor Ian Harper, the man who headed the federal review of competition laws, says that there may be a case for compensating taxi drivers and pharmacy owners if laws are changed to allow greater numbers of new entrants to those

fields. Another option, as reported in The Age, would be to charge a fee on consumers to help the industry adjust to a new world without tax licences. The competition policy review looked at sharing economy services such as Uber and Lyft, which have been disrupting the taxi industry and are still illegal in most states.

## Justice / Police

### **New Top Position**

Mr Graham Ashton, a former Deputy Commissioner under Mr Lay, left that post in late 2014 to join the Australian Federal Police as a Deputy Commissioner.

Mr Ashton mentioned the scourge of ice and a crackdown on family violence among his priorities, but also outlined some less obvious targets: a nationally consistent legislative approach to outlaw bikie gangs and a desire to promptly improve the force's antiquated information technology. He understands the need to embrace new technology and empower officers to work more efficiently, including by implementing some of the measures championed in Mr Lay's aspirational Blue Paper. He is evidently regarded as one of Australia's most experienced counter-terror police officers.

### **Melbourne's Biggest Cop Shop**

Victoria's biggest police station has opened in the CBD. The station sits within a 12-storey complex that will also house another 1000 staff in coming weeks. The response zone for the new station will cover the Docklands and the western end of the CBD, including the Queen Victoria Market. Premier Daniel Andrews said that the City West station was the product of a \$68 million investment. Assistant Commissioner North West Metro Stephen Leane said that the building was equipped with visible security features, including bollards and was also elevated.

### **Power to Watchdog**

An 11th-hour deal for two years allows industry watchdog Fair Work Building and Construction to continue to force construction workers and employers to speak to investigators or face six months'

jail. The powers, which have been crucial to uncovering claims of unlawfulness and intimidation in the building industry, had been due to expire on May 30. Master Builders Australia chief executive Wilhelm Harnisch welcomed the vote, but called for further reform. He said to the Herald Sun that the coercive interviews were needed to allow builders to speak to investigators without ramifications from unions.

### **Email Terrorist Alert**

An email to the force's 13,000 police in early May outlined new anti-terrorism measures, including these: from now on, no police officer is to work alone in a station unless exempted by a supervisor following a risk assessment; at least two officers must work all patrols, including motorcycle patrols; marked vehicles cannot be driven to officer's private residences other than in exceptional circumstances; all uniformed police must be armed and wear bulletproof vests; two armed officers must man each station front counter unless there is a security screen.

Police Association secretary Ron Iddles said, as recorded in the Herald Sun, that the changes would have a big impact on resources, especially in rostering and in terms of the service the force can deliver, but that such changes were necessary for the safety of Association members.

### **Violent Prison Brawls**

A prison guard was knocked out and another injured while breaking up brawls between ethnic gangs in Melbourne's Remand Centre. Tensions remain high with the Security and Emergency Services Group on standby. It is believed disputes over drugs smuggled into the prison sparked the violence between islanders, who have links to outlaw motorcycle gangs, and Sudanese prisoners. MRC is at capacity with 800 inmates being housed there, according to the Herald Sun. Community and Public Sector Union spokesman Julian Kennelly said that the overcrowding in prisons was making inmates volatile.

### **Psychologists' Reports, 'Flimsy'**

Justice Betty King called on the Court of

Appeal to hold a review, arguing that too many defendants were presenting flimsy 'expert' reports and using a legal precedent, known as Verdins case, to ask for reduced sentences. 'It has made the task of sentencing judges more difficult, forcing them to consider reports from psychiatrists, but more usually psychologists, who have often had only very brief interaction with an offender, who have accepted as reliable and truthful the word of that offender as to their state of mind ... as though it was sworn evidence.'

### **Fined Way to Walk**

Thirty jaywalkers a day were busted in a police blitz triggered after the death of a cafe worker in Collins Street. Victoria's top traffic cop, Assistant Commissioner Robert Hill is staggered that even with Josie Edden losing her life in the early-morning dash, pedestrians continue to gamble with their lives. The Herald Sun can reveal that in a 19-day period, days after the 23-year-old's death, 561 pedestrians were nabbed in the operation and fined \$74.

### **ISIS Local Links**

The Al-furqan Islamic Information Centre closed its Springvale South doors just days after its associates were arrested in an alleged plot to murder police on Anzac Day. But the Herald Sun has found that the group and its leader – hate preacher Harun Mehicevic – are still meeting at a suburban gym. AFP sources say they are aware of Al-Furqan members having been meeting for Friday prayers at the Dandenong Council-owned Springers Leisure Centre in Keysborough. Numan Haider, who was shot dead while attacking police with a knife last September, went to lectures at the Springvale South Centre.

### **Good man down**

Victorian parole board chief Bill Gillard has stepped down after revelations that he advised the alleged head of Melbourne's mafia on how to fight the police chief commissioner's decision to ban him from the Crown Casino. After intense pressure from the Justice Department and Corrections Minister Wade Noonan, Mr Gillard advised the government of his intention to retire.





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As reported in The Age, Mr Noonan said that Mr Gillard, a former Supreme Court judge, will remain in his role to help with the transition to his deputy, Judge Frank Shelton. The government now faces a challenging task of finding a new parole board chair, with senior legal figures having been generally reluctant to take on the role, which is seen as controversy-prone and politically sensitive.

#### **Legal Aid in Charade**

One of Victoria's most senior judges has launched a scathing attack on Victoria Legal Aid, slamming its solicitors for 'masquerading' as counsel. Homeless man Scott Miller has pleaded guilty to the rape and murder of a pastry chef, Renau Lau. His case was abruptly halted when his counsel, Stephen Payne, fainted in court and was taken by ambulance to the Epworth Hospital. Justice Betty King said Supreme Court judges had become increasingly concerned at how VLA was briefing lawyers in important cases, and it was something which she planned to raise with Victoria's Chief Justice, Marilyn Warren as reported in the Herald Sun.

#### **Comancheros Bite the Dust**

Comanchero bikies have lost their mantle as Victoria's most powerful organised criminal gang after shutting the gang's original Victorian clubhouses in South Melbourne and Hallam, under pressure from Victoria Police's bikie Echo taskforce. Police have laid hundreds of charges against members of the bikie gang. According to the Herald Sun, the vacuum left by the Comancheros has been filled by Australia's newest major outlaw club, Mongols MC. The Mongols are being 'taken over' by new members described as 'Middle Eastern' crime figures, many of whom have been 'patched' in the prison system.

#### **PSO's Protective Aggression**

Aggressive tactics used by protective service officers at Melbourne train stations are scaring commuters into waiving rights and escalating into violent confrontations, a community law service has found. The Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria has undertaken a three-year project to engage with commuters regarding their concerns with PSOs since the officers' introduction in 2012.

In one case reported in The Age, a 15-year-old-girl was roughly handled after confronting seven PSOs who, she believed, were unfairly targeting a homeless man.

#### **ANZAC's Weapon Cache**

A teenager accused of supplying weapons for an Anzac Day terrorist attack allegedly ordered more than 200 weapons from overseas in less than a year. Victorian and Federal police charged Mehran Azami, 19, with offences following his initial arrest in counter-terrorism raids in mid-April. Mr

Azami, who was previously charged with four counts of possessing a prescribed weapon, is now accused of importing dozens of weapons, including knives, knuckle dusters, batons and tasers disguised as iPhones between May 2014 and April 2015.

According to The Age, Detective Senior Constable Adam Foley told Melbourne Magistrates Court that Mr Azami had passed some of the weapons to Harun Causevic and Sevdet Besim, who are charged with conspiring to plan the attack on Anzac Day.

#### **Easier Bailout**

People accused of serious sexual or violent crimes now have a better chance of getting bail. This change follows a landmark ruling from the Court of Appeal in December which said that non-custodial Community Corrections Orders could now replace some 'medium' jail sentences, including for some rape and homicide offences. According to the Herald Sun, lawyers for people facing charges to which the ruling could now apply are now arguing that their clients should not be denied bail while awaiting trial, because even if they were ultimately found guilty, they would not now face jail. Victoria's Chief Crown Prosecutor, Gavin Silbert, QC, said that the guideline ruling would have a strong effect.

#### **Bottom of Class**

An Education Department bureaucrat was sacked after he told a corruption inquiry that he destroyed evidence in a panic after investigators searched his home. The Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission heard that John Allman, who was the Education Department's south-eastern regional director, had been captured on secret audio recordings discussing the use of 'banker schools', which were used to secretly channel department funds.

And a primary school principal, Peter Paul, was stood down while his role in the purchase of \$30,000 of wine, for which his school was invoiced, is investigated. The Herald Sun reports that the wine was bought from the Chandler Park Primary principal's son's company.

#### **Ice Road Truckies**

Victoria Police figures obtained by the Herald Sun reveal that record numbers of truck drivers are high while behind the wheel, and 156 drivers tested positive to drug use last year. Trucking industry insiders say that deals are being organised using code over the radio and drugs are then handed out.

Victoria Police says that 'ratbag drivers' in charge of driving 60-tonne 'weapons' are treating other motorists as potential road-kill, and are risking the lives of innocent Victorians. Of those drivers tested for drugs, one in 14 tested positive. VicRoads

has stripped 11,704 heavy vehicle licences from truck drivers for offences including drugs and speeding. Among the drugs of choice for truckies are speed, ice and marijuana.

#### **Public Plea for Protection**

There have been more than 100 assaults on public transport staff in Victoria since the beginning of last year, prompting a united plea from unions and industry for more to be done to protect employees. Proposals before government include training staff in self-defence and conflict resolution, lengthening custodial sentences for violent offenders and placing protective services officers on buses. The bus industry has already committed to installing driver security screens on Melbourne route buses, in response to what it calls 'the most serious issue confronting the Melbourne workforce'.

Assaults on transport staff include punching, kicking, spitting and being threatened with knives. A report, which was commissioned by the Bus Association of Victoria, found that in numerous cases the impact of an assault went beyond physical injury, with many drivers left psychologically incapable of returning to the job.

#### **A Matter Worth Hearing**

Judges risk being traumatised by serious criminal cases, according to Rob Gordon who is one of five psychologists and psychiatrists whom the County Court has enlisted to debrief judges and teach them how to manage stress. According to The Age, Dr Gordon, who has worked with the Red Cross and child protection workers, said judges faced 'relentless exposure to one tragedy after another'.

Though more resilient to stress than the average person, he said judges were largely isolated from the community and unable to discuss their work or respond publicly to criticism.

### **Local Government**

#### **Thirsty Suburbs**

Until recently, The Age reports, it was necessary to win a compulsory public vote before restaurants and cafes could serve alcohol in the dry areas running through several Melbourne suburbs: namely, Balwyn North, Canterbury, Camberwell, Glen Iris, and Ashburton. That requirement was overturned in early May by the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation authority, which says that no cafe or restaurant liquor licence has been rejected by a majority of residents for five years. From now on, it will be the commission which decides on licences.

#### **Safety First is Stupid**

Moonee Valley City Council spent more than \$33,000 on a basketball ring in Airport

West, and it is now refusing to install a \$3 net – for fear that if it does install one, players' dental braces could get caught and be ripped from their mouths. But a complaint has been made after the Council refused to install the net, which would guide balls straight down and prevent them from spilling on a nearby road as reported by the Herald Sun. Council chief executive Neville Smith said a net that could be grabbed or torn posed an 'unacceptable risk'.

#### **Rocket Rate Rise**

Council rates are being raised by more than seven per cent despite the state government wanting rises capped at the level of inflation. Melton, Stonnington, Whitehorse, Moreland, Yarra, Boroondara and Greater Dandenong Councils have released their proposed rates – all at least three times the rate of inflation which is 1.3 per cent. Whitehorse Council will slug its residents with a 7.6 per cent rise.

A spokeswoman for Local Government Minister Natalie Hutchins said that the minister did not have the power to stop councils hiking rates under existing legislation, although this would change when legislation comes in next year to curb rates.

#### **Tech Bins Rolled Out**

Solar-powered bins that crush rubbish and use wi-fi to send alerts when they are almost full may be coming to Hume Council in parks and reserves. A product of Solar Bins Australia, the BigBelly bins feature internal compactors that increase the capacity of a normal bin by six to eight times.

They also have wi-fi capabilities and send alerts when they are 85 per cent full. The bins are already in use overseas and in New South Wales, Western Australian and Tasmania. But the bins come with a hefty price tag; a standard unit costs \$5,000 outright, or else \$149 a month over five years on lease.

#### **Geelong's Warning**

Melbourne's Lord Mayor Robert Doyle has warned of 'danger signs' emerging from Victoria's second-biggest city, Geelong. Cr Doyle said he was concerned about the shock resignation of Greater Geelong Council's new CEO, Gillian Miles, and the 'hounding' from office of former directly elected mayor Keith Fagg, as reported in the Herald Sun. The former Transport Accident Commission senior executive has taken a senior role with the state Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources.

#### **Councils Punishing Residents**

Local councils have been accused of getting out of control, with one proposing to fine residents for putting bins out too early, and another planning to spy on ratepayers for illegal recycling once the bin

service is reduced. Golden Plains Shire in western Victoria had a rate hike of 6.8 per cent this year, but will collect garbage bins fortnightly instead of weekly from July. It also plans to use cameras to spy on residents who put rubbish in the wrong bin. John Roskam, from the free-market think-tank the Institute of Public Affairs, said that councils were veering out of control.

## **Melbourne**

#### **Waste Firm Posts Shortfall**

Melbourne City Council reports reveal that Citywide, a waste and maintenance firm owned by the Council, will post a revenue shortfall of almost \$2 million over a two-year period. This is cash the council had expected to receive as a return from ownership of the company, which has about 1100 employees and operates across Australia. Former Premier John Brumby recently took over as chairman of Citywide, and he oversaw the departure of its longstanding CEO, Kerry Osborne, in March.

#### **Spiritualists Get Cash**

A building owned by Victoria's Spiritualists has sold prior to auction for \$3.4 million. The two-storey boutique sandstone property at 71-73 A'Beckett Street was owned and occupied by the Victorian Spiritualists' Union for 55 years. Colliers International's Daniel Wolman and Oliver Hay said that the sale attracted more than 150 inquiries.

#### **Free Trams Cut Parking Bills**

A 2880-space, twin car park in Docklands has erected large billboards on Footscray Road, a major feeder road into the CBD, advertising '\$10 all day parking [and a] free tram ride'. The signs spruik that free tram travel in the CBD and Docklands, introduced on January 1, has made it 'a far more economical option to park at Harbour Town ... and tram via a possible three routes to popular corporate office locations'.

It affirms predictions from public transport advocates that the free tram zone, which combined with fare zone changes cost about \$100 million a year to maintain, would financially benefit commuters who drive into the city, not train and tram commuters. Tony Morton, president of the Public Transport Users Association, said that the free tram zone perversely rewarded drivers.

#### **Council on its Bike**

Several new bike lanes or route upgrades for inner Melbourne are on the cards as the city council prepares to release its latest vision to get more people cycling. Bike-friendly options are planned to better connect La Trobe and Albert streets, and Spring Street cyclists will get a green pavement and profiled edge-line.

Over the next year, other works are either

proposed or under way at Flemington Road, Queensbridge Street, Dynon Road, Arden Street, Gisborne Street and Leveson Street. As reported in the Herald Sun, Melbourne City Council wants to turn the municipality into a cycling city and is calling for ideas to help shape its coming Bicycle Plan 2016-2020.

#### **No Square Smoking**

Premier Daniel Andrews has thrown his support behind making a large public square in central Melbourne a smoke-free zone. Melbourne City Council is seeking input on a plan to make City Square, on the corner of Collins and Swanston streets, smoke-free. The council admits its plan for City Square is bold, after banning smoking in three CBD lane ways.

#### **Another Wasteful Video**

Hypnotising hipsters has cost the City of Melbourne \$1.5 million. The Town Hall has again come under fire over its spending, this time on a video marketing campaign called the Land of Inbetween. Costing \$3,500 every second, the videos show young urban professionals being hypnotised so they can rediscover Melbourne. Hypnotist Andrew Newton was flown in from Europe to guest star at a believed cost of \$20,000. As previously reported in the Herald Sun, this controversy comes just weeks after the council was slammed for granting \$20,000 on a choreographer to teach parking inspectors to dance.

#### **Look Behind the Façade**

Under a review of the city's heritage planning policies, Melbourne City Council is preparing to phase out the old system of the A, B, C or D grading of heritage buildings. Critics say a D grading often meant 'D for demolition' for developers. A prime example is the Palace Theatre in Bourke Street, which was originally graded D under the system. There has been a long-running battle to save the historic building from demolition to make way for a new hotel.

The matter is now before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. At present, the council is looking to adopt a system where buildings that have enough heritage value are graded as either significant or contributory, bringing the city into line with state government requirements as reported in The Age. There are also hopes that the new rules will provide greater protection against the trend of 'façadism' in CBD, where only the front wall of a heritage building is kept.

#### **Non-Compliance Cladding**

Fire raced up 13 storeys of a Melbourne apartment building in part because the outside wall was not clad in fire-resistant sheeting, the city's Metropolitan Fire Brigade says in a report. 'The external cladding material on this building did not, to the degree necessary, avoid the spread

of fire as required by the Building Code of Australia', the report said.

'Simultaneous internal fire ignition events over multiple floors are simply an unacceptable fire safety solution for a residential high-rise building, or any other acceptable fire safety solution for a residential high-rise building, or any other occupiable building for that matter.' Victoria's Planning Minister Richard Wynne said that he would draw the report's findings to the Australian Building Codes Board, the body responsible for the National Construction Code and planning ministers nationally. 'The public must have confidence that building safety standards are strictly adhered to.'

#### **Go for IT**

Residents of the Melbourne suburb of Point Cook, who want their suburb to become an independent nation, styled on the glamorous Mediterranean principality of Monaco, are probably ambitious, Premier Andrews says. He has urged Point Cook residents to drop plans to secede and model their nation on the French Riviera tax haven. The Premier was responding to an online petition calling for a referendum on granting sovereign nation status to the bayside suburb. Supporters say they are fed up with inadequate services.

#### **On Your Bike**

The 2015-28 Motorcycle Plan will be voted on by local councillors to give motorcycles and scooters preferential treatment over cars and trucks parked in Melbourne's inner city. In the document, staff point to a European study that showed that if 10 per cent of private cars were replaced by motorcycles, commuting times could decrease by up to 40 per cent. As reported in *The Age*, paid car parking could be replaced with free scooter spaces, while the council will also try to force developers to of new apartment and office towers to create more motorcycle parking and supply lockers for protective clothing.

### **Media, Multimedia and IT**

#### **Businesses Lose Out**

Thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in benefits across Australia have been lost because of NBN Co's decision to target residential areas instead of businesses, according to a new study into the \$41 billion national broadband network. Research firm Geografia surveyed 322 businesses in three precincts in south-east Melbourne, and did so on behalf of the Frankston, Greater Dandenong and Kingston councils. It found that in those areas alone, the lack of NBN services had cost the region 1,024 jobs and \$8.4 million per year.

#### **Legal Limits Imposed**

A joint paper by civil liberties group Liberty

Victoria and the Australian Association for Unmanned Aerial Systems released to mark the Privacy Awareness Week addresses the thorny issues stemming from the increased availability and capability of cheap drones. While the Civil Aviation Safety Authority regulates remotely piloted aircraft from a safety standpoint, it does not see surveillance and privacy issues as part of its responsibilities.

In *The Australian*, it emerged that the paper calls for national law reform to address rising privacy issues, such as whether it is legal for a drone to film someone in their backyard or at the beach. The issue is becoming more pressing because of falling prices that have put once-expensive technology, developed for military use, within reach of consumers.

### **Planning**

#### **Market Oasis**

Queen Victoria Market would become an 'oasis' amid higher-density development in a council rezoning plan to better integrate it with the city. Facilities for traders and patrons would be improved and popular features like heritage sheds and the dairy and meat halls would be retained by a \$250 million draft plan. The main car park on Queen Street would become a green plaza and streets would be redesigned to give cyclists and pedestrians better access.

According to the *Herald Sun*, the council is adamant that rate hikes will not pay for the market redevelopment, much of the cost of which is to be met by on-site commercial developments and surpluses of \$130 million generated over the next four years.

#### **Palais Alive and Kicking**

The future of St Kilda's Palais Theatre looks secure with a State budget promise to commit \$13.4 million in funding for repairs. The funds are part of a \$202 million package to boost arts and culture across Victoria, with \$54.4 million allocated to a major redevelopment of the State Library, \$30 million to redevelop the Geelong Performing Arts Centre, \$18 million for Museum Victoria and \$9 million to the National Gallery of Victoria.

#### **Fed Square Stalemate**

A key redevelopment project in the CBD could struggle to get off the ground because private investors fear it will be financially unviable. A number of developers have submitted proposals to fully fund the 3.3-hectare Federation Square extension under an expression-of-interest process started by the former Coalition Government.

But industry sources have told the *Herald Sun* that Labor is reviewing the project and will require building heights to be scaled

back, making it difficult for developers to make a profit. Planning Minister Richard Wynne insisted that the site remained a 'fantastic' urban renewal opportunity that would include good housing and offer commercial investment.

#### **A Colourful Box**

Dubbed *The Icon*, an 18-storey building that resembles a stack of several brightly coloured boxes is taking shape in the inner city. The \$100 million apartment block was designed to be a striking landmark welcoming people to St Kilda. Local artist Matthew Johnson worked with Jackson Clements Burrows Architects to produce the design featuring blocks of shimmering violet, indigo blue, moss green and luminous yellow. The building will be finished later this year, but all 119 units have already sold, as reported in the *Herald Sun*.

#### **Slum Fears Raised**

The City of Melbourne is powerless to stop unscrupulous landlords and tenants from creating the same slum-like housing conditions in the CBD's high-rises that contributed to the Docklands apartment tower blaze last year as reported in *The Age*. The brigade's report found the blaze took just 11 minutes to engulf one side of the 23-storey Latrobe Street building after a discarded cigarette left on an eighth-floor balcony set alight the cheap, fire-prone cladding.

#### **Historic Five Year Plan**

Transforming the beleaguered Queen's Hall into a second reading room, a new 'e-town hall' and a rooftop garden will be key planks in a new \$88.1 million revamp of the State Library of Victoria. Creative Industries Minister Martin Foley said that the five-year project would open up a further 40 per cent of the building for public use and create a library for the future.

According to *The Age*, the 159-year old library building will also have a new public entrance at Russell Street, along with cafes and shops. Acting chief executive office and state librarian Justin Hyde said that the opening hours would be re-examined as part of the redevelopment.

#### **No Leaning on Tower**

Planning Minister Richard Wynne has denied the allegation that a meeting between his staff and the militant CFMEU played any role in his decision to knock back a Grocon apartment tower plan. Mr Wynne rejected the application for a 46-level development in the CBD against the advice of his department, on the basis that a 46 storey tower at 85 Spring Street would be too high and too close to other buildings. Weeks after his chief of staff met with CFMEU officials who opposed the project, Mr Wynne had quashed the proposal. According to the *Herald Sun*, Grocon and the union have been locked in industrial warfare for several years.

## Sport

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### Saga Going Global

The Essendon drugs saga will disrupt a third, and possibly even a fourth season after the World Anti-Doping Authority decided to appeal the AFL anti-doping tribunal's verdict on 34 current and past players according to Essendon Coach James Hird. The Financial Review reports that the authority said it was appealing an AFL tribunal verdict in March on the basis that it 'was not comfortably satisfied' of assertions that the players were given the banned drug Thymosin beta-4, and therefore that these players breached the competition's anti-doping code during Essendon's controversial 2012 supplements scheme. The matter will be heard by the Court of Arbitration for Sport, the highest authority in world sport to handle disputes.

### A Fighting Force

Cage-fighting inspectors are being considered by the Victorian government to police the brutal sport that it recently legalised. Government inspectors would be hired to ensure cage-fights are conducted legally, with the Department of Health and Human Services to deploy staff to bouts state-wide. Former Department of Justice boss Peter Harmsworth has urged the Government to dissolve the Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board, currently regulating the sports, and bring the sports themselves under the control of Spring Street.

He told the Herald Sun he advised the Government to hire a pool of its own inspectors to monitor fights, safety conditions and conduct checks now carried out by the board.

### Fill the G

Footy fans have called for empty seats in exclusive areas of blockbuster AFL matches to be sold to supporters. MCC, AFL and club members would see reserved seats turned over to fans under the proposal to squeeze more people and atmosphere into sold-out matches at the MCG and Etihad Stadium. In a 'massive cultural shift' AFL Fans' Association president Gerry Eeman has asked the AFL to demand members confirm by text message if they were going to a game.

### Footy Food Extravaganza

Etihad Stadium chief Paul Sargeant said pie sales had increased threefold since the venue started selling them for just \$3 on Sundays and were 2.5 times higher than last year. Sales of Four 'N Twenty pies increased by almost 10,000 at the MCG in round one compared to the opening week of the 2013 season when similar crowds

packed the home of football. The MCG this year cut prices of popular food by up to 40 per cent in response to growing supporter angst at the high cost of feeding their families at matches.

### Footy Player Dies

A young father has died during a country football match after collapsing on the field after a tackle. The Herald Sun reported that Otway Districts Football Club player Aaron Mahoney ran into the outstretched arm of an opponent during his club's clash with Lorne at the Gellibrand Recreation Reserve. Mr Mahoney leaves behind two children.

### Judd Threatened

Video has emerged of a man wearing an Essendon jumper threatening to harm Carlton star Chris Judd outside a Lygon Street restaurant. With the incident involving Hawthorn coach Alastair Clarkson and a Port Adelaide fan from another night still simmering, footage on Channel Seven showed Judd being subjected to verbal abuse by a man wearing a Bombers jumper while the dual Brownlow medallist was dining at a restaurant during the day. Carlton said that neither the club nor Judd would take the incident further.

## Transport – Ports

A consortium of stevedores and shipping groups angry over a proposed 800 per cent hike for DP World at the Port of Melbourne has sent a letter to Treasurer Joe Hockey asking the federal government to consider regulating the port without the involvement of the Victorian government. A coalition of companies affected by the proposed rent increase, led by Asciano, the owner of stevedore Patrick Corporation, sent letters to Mr Hockey as well as Victorian Treasurer Tim Pallas and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Chairman Rod Sims, formally expressing its concerns over the port's privatisation.

### Portable Concerns

Rent hikes at the soon-to-be privatised Port of Melbourne will be a 'tax on importers and exporters forever' and could trigger an economically damaging 'upwards spiral' at other ports, the chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has warned. Rod Sims's intervention in the controversy comes as the Victorian government faces mounting pressure to intervene to block the proposed 650 per cent increase.

Premier Andrews has faced friendly fire over the move to hike rents ahead of the privatisation, with Tasmanian Labor leader Bryan Green joining that state's Liberal Premier Will Hodgman and business leaders in condemning the price rise. As reported in The Australian, more than 25 per cent of the traffic at the Port of

Melbourne – the nation's busiest container port – involves goods shipped to and from Tasmania.

### Port Revamp Threat

A war over a federal construction code of practice yet to pass Parliament is threatening to delay part of the \$1.6 billion Port of Melbourne expansion. Building giant McConnell Dowell still does not have a workplace agreement with the CFMEU because it cannot get the union to sign off on 'code-compliant' aspects of the deal. The construction union argues that the code is not yet in place, so shouldn't impact on current agreements.

But the federal government has warned builders that non-compliant companies could be banned from government-funded work, should the proposed rules pass the Senate, as reported in the Herald Sun.

### Docks Raided

Victoria Police is part of the Trident Taskforce, which has launched Operation Poseidon with a raid on the docks as reported in the Herald Sun. The operation aims to 'detect, deter and disrupt' criminal activity on the state's waterfront. In a show of force, Victoria Police was joined by the Australian Federal Police, Customs and Border Protection, Australian Crime Commission and the Sheriff's Office.

## Transport – Air

### Spirits Up and Away

Melbourne's newest airline, Free Spirit Air, has started taking off from Essendon to Burnie, flying up to three times a day into that Tasmanian city. In the Herald Sun, Managing director Roman Badov said that flights will start from \$149 one way in his Beechcraft 1900, which takes 19 passengers.

### Avalon's Golden Incentive

Geelong's troubled Avalon Airport has been thrown a \$12 million taxpayer-funded lifeline under a deal struck by the Victorian government to keep budget operator Jetstar at the airport until 2025. In exchange for the money, Jetstar has promised to increase the number of flights from five to seven, with two new yet-to-be disclosed domestic destinations to be added as part of a push to boost passenger numbers by 40 per cent. Airport operator Linfox has also agreed to chip in an extra \$14 million over 10 years according to the Financial Review, with Jetstar also making a modest contribution to the bailout fund.

### Not Even Kidding

Qantas' decision to enforce 'smart casual' dress more strictly in its main capital city lounges has led to more complaints from passengers refused entry for wearing thongs, including designer leather ones that had not been on the airline's initial list of banned clothing. This follows a

resolution to enforce guidelines more strictly, due to complaints from some passengers that dress standards had dropped. 'Singlets, bare feet, rubber thongs and clothing with offensive images or slogans are, in most cases, likely to be deemed unacceptable,' Qantas said to The Age.

## Transport – Rail

### **Station Skipping Rising**

Figures on how many times Metro's trains skip stations will be published every month. This change comes as the state government seeks to put the heat on Metro to cut out the annoying practice. It revealed Metro has altered a train service to unscheduled express a total of no fewer than 2,119 times since April last year.

The practice, in which trains purposely skip stations where they are scheduled to stop, so that Metro can make up lost time, peaked in May 2014, when 322 services were altered. Station skipping hit its lowest level in November, the month the state election was held, when just 47 services ran 'unscheduled express'.

### **Costs are Booming**

Boom gates at some of Melbourne's busiest level crossings are down for more than two-thirds of the morning peak, leaving motorists stranded in traffic for hours every day. An analysis of the 17 level crossings identified for removal by Labor in its first budget shows motorists are stuck at boom gates for a combined 16 hours during morning peak, causing massive disruption and costs, as recorded in The Age. Crossings on the Dandenong corridor were particularly disruptive. The boom gate at Koornang Road in Carnegie was found to be down for a maximum of 87 minutes between 7am and 9am, or an extraordinary 72.5 per cent of the time.

### **Crossed off the Map**

Crossings on the Sunbury, Frankston, Ringwood and Dandenong lines have been put at the front of the funding queue in the government's \$5-\$6 billion level crossing removal program, with \$2.4 billion having been committed for 20 crossing removals over the next four years in Tuesday's budget. But equally busy crossings on the overcrowded Werribee and Craigieburn lines – both of which run through Labor heartland – look likely to stay in place until after the next election. And another key Labor promise – the \$400-\$600 million Mernda rail extension – is off to a slow start, with just \$9 million locked in for that project in this budget.

### **The Land With No Name**

A \$21 million train station to be built near Southland Shopping Centre is still unnamed. Both Kingston and Bayside Councils have called on Public Transport Victoria to ensure that the new railway station is named Southland Station. A

Bayside spokesman said that working groups had found 'a reluctance' to do this, 'because of the association with the adjacent privately owned shopping centre' as reported in the Herald Sun.

### **Boost to Manufacturing**

A \$274 million order for 20 new trams has formed part of a \$2 billion commitment to train and tram manufacturing in the state budget. The funding package includes \$1.3 billion for 37 new high-capacity metro trains, \$257 million for new V/Line rail carriages and \$90 million for five new X'Trapolis trains. Altogether, the government estimates, 60 per cent of its tram fleet will need to be replaced in the coming decade. The 20 new E-Class trams will be built at the Bombardier factory in Dandenong and are set to be completed in 2018.

### **We Can Do Better than That**

Governments rarely have the opportunity to line up good policy with good politics. This happy conjunction is open to the state government if it does two things, according to Kenneth Davidson in The Age. Davidson reckons that it should pass legislation amending the Audit Act. That way, it would be able to deliver on its pre-election promise to give the Auditor-General the power to scrutinise public-private partnerships, including the power to 'follow the dollar' into the activities of the private partner.

And second, the government should establish a forensic audit of the now aborted East-West Link PPP signed by the previous government. The major benefit of the East-West Link was access to the Port of Melbourne. Planners failed to identify that benefits could have been achieved at a fraction of the costs by linking the Port of Melbourne to inland ports to the north at Thomastown and to the east to Frankston via dedicated underground and or above road level single-track freight lines which would shuttle containers directly to the industrial suburbs, removing the necessity of running trucks through the inner commercial and residential suburbs. The obvious model is Los Angeles, where the port is 20 miles inland.

### **Dysfunctional Tram Stops**

Melbourne's low-floor trams are being allocated to tram routes that lack wheelchair-accessible stops, while accessible tram stops are being built on routes that have no low-floor trams. By law, 80 per cent of Melbourne's tram network must be accessible by 2017 and the network must be fully accessible by 2032, with low-floor trams and platform stops end-to-end on every route.

There are almost 400 low-floor tram stops in Melbourne and they have been built across the network, yet most of those stops are in suburban locations that have never had a low-floor tram. The Victorian

Council of Social Services has called for better co-ordination.

### **Tram Cam Trial**

Melbourne's trams are involved in more than two prangs a day, prompting action to fit them with crash cams to avoid collisions between cars and other trams. Yarra Trams will trial CCTV and radar technology to alert drivers to potential hazards, which currently delay thousands of passengers on Melbourne's busiest routes. GPS technology will allow hot spots to be mapped.

Yarra Trams crash statistics show there were 823 tram-to-vehicle crashes in 2014. Trams are also crashing into each other, with figures showing 15 accidents last year – down 25 per cent on the year before. According to the Herald Sun, Melbourne's tram network is the largest in the world, sharing 80 per cent of road space with motorists.

### **Who's Paying?**

London does it. New York does it. Even the Gold Coast does it. But a special levy on commercial property owners who will benefit from a proposed rail tunnel under Melbourne is a bad idea, Lord Mayor Robert Doyle says. The state government has allocated \$1.5 billion towards the proposed Melbourne Metro, an underground rail line to run from Kensington to South Yarra. However, The Age reports that this money is only for planning and property acquisition, where the government cannot say how it will pay the remainder of the \$11 billion cost.

### **Myki Mybully**

Innocent commuters are being bullied into paying myki fines by the state's transport department in an apparent 'standover racket', human rights lawyer Julian Burnside QC says. In September, Fairfax Media revealed the news that not a single myki fine contested in court had reached a contested hearing, which involves a plea of not guilty, with most of the 109 cases having been withdrawn or dismissed, according to the court data.

### **Close the Gates**

The Stony Point rail line is closed indefinitely, following several safety breaches in which boom gates failed to drop for an approaching train. Metro cannot give a date on when the line will re-open. According to The Age, the most recent level crossing failure happened in Tyabb, about 80 kilometres south of Melbourne.

### **Brand New Rubbish Bins**

Rubbish bins are returning to inner-city train stations, six months after they were all removed over fears they could conceal bombs. In early April, Public Transport Victoria started to introduce new bins, modelled on those used in London, that feature clear plastic bags hanging from

metal loops. It is understood that the updated design works better during times of heightened terror threats as the bags can be easily removed.

## Transport – Road

### **Permanent Go Slow**

Speed limits on the Tullamarine Freeway to and from the airport will be permanently slashed to 80km/h once major road widening works are complete. A standard 80km/h limit would operate in both directions from the city at Power Street to the Melrose Drive exit, just 5.5km from the entry to Melbourne Airport. Construction works to widen CityLink and the Tullamarine Freeway will start in October.

VicRoads director of the CityLink Tulla Widening Project, Andrew Williams, said that the speed reduction was 'due to the removal of the emergency lanes.' Extra lanes will be created by removing emergency stopping lanes and reducing existing lane widths by 15 centimetres (to 3.35 metres). The CityLink-Tullamarine corridor carries 210,000 vehicles a day.

### **Billion Dollar Buses Not Fare**

It costs \$1 billion a year to run Melbourne's public buses, yet there is no guarantee that bus operators give value for money, and there is little incentive for them to work to provide punctual and reliable services. So a scathing Auditor-General's report has found. The report identified serious deficiencies in how Victoria manages its contracts with bus operators, which provide the only public transport within 400 metres of 70 per cent of Melbourne households.

In *The Age*, it was stated that these deficiencies include an inability to track buses reliably against the timetables; failure to tackle fare evasion; and a decision by Public Transport Victoria not to impose financial penalties when an operator did not meet its contract.

### **Hoddle Street Awaiting Fix**

Hoddle Street's promised \$60 million congestion fix, pledged by Premier Andrews in opposition, will have to wait a few more years yet, after his government set aside less than \$2 million for a study in this year's state budget as reported in *The Age*. But there will be more lanes built for the Metropolitan Ring Road, and a major bridge used by thousands of trucks in Melbourne's west will be strengthened, as part of the key roads initiatives.

And a new, and long-promised bridge will be built over the Yarra River at Chandler Highway in Kew and Alphington. The budget also allocates \$16 million this financial year for widening Footscray's Whitehall Street, and strengthening and widening the nearby Shepherd Bridge, used by cars, trucks and cyclists.

### **Sneaky Devil**

Transurban knows that the state government on the other side of the negotiating table is desperate for a deal to build a second river crossing. Such a crossing would soften the political embarrassment and financial cost of its East-West débâcle. In the space of a month it will have all but buried that with this proposal, to keep motorists happy and the cross-city rail tunnel, to keep public transport users happy.

However, according to Terry McCrann in the *Herald Sun*, the devil is in the detail that would cost Victorian motorists literally billions in the words 'extension of the current CityLink Concession Deed' which would probably extend the whole toll system well past 2040.

### **Tulla Freeway Takes Off**

A \$1.3 billion upgrade of the Tullamarine Freeway and CityLink will add 33 kilometres of new lanes and cut travel times to the airport by up to 20 minutes under a partnership between the State and federal governments and Transurban. Extra lanes will be created from the airport to the Domain tunnel at Southbank, including on the Bolte Bridge, the West Gate Freeway east-bound bottleneck, and the bridge-freeway ramp.

Construction on what will become Victoria's biggest ongoing road project will begin this year, with 1,400 jobs to be created. The CityLink Tullamarine corridor is one of the most heavily used in Melbourne, carrying 210,000 vehicles a day in its busiest section. This is a number expected to rise to 235,000 by 2031. In comparison, 200,000 vehicles travel on the West Gate Bridge each day.

### **Users Must Pay**

VicRoads has rejected more than \$2.75 million in claims for damage caused by potholes, trees, dodgy signs and objects on the road because vehicles were not damaged enough. Despite 2,383 submissions, only 27 drivers were successfully paid out, amounting to a total of \$27,643. Alarming, a large number of claims were denied because the damage was valued at less than \$1,330. The VicRoads threshold acts as a kind of insurance excess, meaning that hundreds of Victorians were forced to pay damage out of their own pockets, even if the department was at fault.

### **Happy Go Lucky**

Motorists are being urged to smile and 'give a wave' in a state-wide bid to reduce aggression and stress on the roads. The three-year initiative – also aimed at cyclists and pedestrians – follows concern about a lack of respect among road users. Police are backing the plan as they embarked on a huge safety blitz over Easter. The state government has developed the anti-aggression push, focused on the impact

mood and driver behaviour has on driver safety. As reported in the *Herald Sun*, the 'Travel Happy' video states anger and stress on the roads is contagious but can be countered by 'the little things.'

## Utilities

### **Giant Solar Bungle**

Electricity giant AGL has admitted bungling the accounts of thousands of solar panel customers. About 8000 Victorian customers have been overpaid to generate surplus power to the grid for up to two years and four months. The company mistakenly rewarded them with feed-in tariff rates up to 4.5 times higher than intended. But it will not claw back any money, and has instead advised that their rebate will be slashed to the correct amount from their next bill.

## Society

### **From Table to the Grave**

Slashing the amount of salt each Victorian consumes by just half a teaspoon a day could help save 800 lives state-wide and shave \$50 million a year off the health bill. Almost six times more Victorians die as a result of high salt intake than on the roads, a staggering statistic that needed to change, according to the state's peak health group.

VicHealth has released a new State of Salt report aimed at helping Australia reach its commitment to reducing salt intake by 30 per cent by 2025 to meet the World Health Organisation global target as reported in the *Herald Sun*, where the average Victorian consumes eight grams of salt per day.

### **Topless Bar Girl**

From her position high on the wall, Chloe has cast a watchful eye over the drinkers at Young and Jacksons for more than a century, and has been valued at \$5 million. The owner of Young and Jacksons is ALH Group, the pubs and pokies empire founded by Bruce Mattheson.

Chloe arrived in Australia in 1879 for the Sydney International Exhibition, and travelled south in 1880 for the Melbourne International Exhibition, where it was bought by Dr Thomas Fitzgerald, who put it on public display, then after controversy, located it in the front room of his house, which was viewable from the street. Young and Jacksons co-founder Henry Young bought the painting in 1909, and promptly hung her over the public bar. Have you seen Chloe in recent years. Go on your way to the National Gallery, or after!

### **This Ain't No Vale**

Melbourne GP Andrew Varigos is finally settling into retirement after almost a century of service to our city's sickest. One of the hardest working doctors in Melbourne has just turned 100, after

retiring at the age of 95. When he was born in March 1915, the Shrine of Remembrance did not exist and horses outnumbered cars. He was the fourth-oldest in a family of seven from South Melbourne, who supported the Swans. When he was five, his family moved to Bourke Street next to the Palace Theatre and the city became his playground. He lived through the depression and war years and became a pioneering pharmacist during the 1940s. A decade later he set up a medical practice in Victoria Parade and for the next fifty years looked after Melbourne's growing Greek community.

**Stuck in Traffic Hell**

The average Melbourne driver spends the equivalent of more than three days a year stuck in traffic according to a study reported in the Herald Sun. GPS manufacturer Tom-Tom's annual 'Traffic Index' revealed Melbourne was the second-most congested city in Australia, behind Sydney (21st in the world). The study showed that for every half-hour commute, Melburnians spend an extra 20 minutes in traffic.

**Historic Collection Heads to Town**

More than 400 works from the personal collection of Catherine the Great, from the grand Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg will show at the National Gallery of Victoria. Masterpieces from the Hermitage will be on show from July 31 to November 8.

**Who's Living Next Door?**

Melbournians don't know their neighbours. Statistics from the Victorian Coroner reveal that it took more than one week to discover 104 Victorians over the age of 50 who died of natural causes in 2011. More than one month went by before 11 of them were found. The deaths reveal a growing social problem as more people move into high-rise towers, live alone and take comfort in their isolation.

The Victorian Institute for Forensic Medicine, which works with the State Coroner to investigate deaths, said that the issue also caused problems for police. Medical death investigator David Ranson admitted that confirmations of a particular death as being not suspicious were sometimes no more than educated guesses.

**The Place to Be**

Victoria is cementing its status as a population magnet, writes Paul Gilder in the Herald Sun. Melbourne's population grew by 95,700 last year, with a net migration of 4,000 people to Melbourne from elsewhere than Australia and 8,800 from other states. Nearly 11,200 Sydneysiders moved to Melbourne too.

**VALE**

- Barnacle, John Scientist.
- Bird, John Allistair – Worked for Gas and Fuel Corporation
- Gutman, Dr Pamela Christine Jones, Peter 71 Barrister.
- Laurence, Michael, 80 – Scriptwriter and producer, best known for his successful series Return to Eden.
- McNiff, Francine Valerie – A member of the Victorian Bar and a Children's Court Magistrate.
- Mein, Hazel Joy .79 Liberal Party Farmer
- Pearce, Ian Gordon

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HOW SHOULD WE PRESENT OUR HISTORY TO FUTURE GENERATIONS?

*Today, all of us who have not been tested in war salute all of those who have.  
Most of us have never worn our country's uniform.  
We have not climbed the steep cliffs of Gallipoli.  
We have not trudged through the snow of Pskovcourt.  
We have not struggled through the mud of Passchendaele.  
We have not experienced the horrors of Hellfire Pass,  
or fought through the jungles of Kohoda or Vietnam,  
or shaken the Uruzgum sand from our clothes.  
We have not risked being shot out of the skies over Germany or torpedoed in the Med or in the Pacific.  
But we are the better for those who have.  
Because they rose to their challenges, we believe that it's a little easier for us to rise to ours.  
Their example, we believe, helps us to be better than we would otherwise be.  
That's why we're here: to acknowledge what they have done for us - and what they still do for us.  
The official historian, Charles Bean, said of the original ANZACs: "their story rises as it will always rise, above the mists of ages, a monument to great hearted men; and, for their nation a possession forever.  
Yes, they are us; and when we strive enough for the right things, we can be more like them.  
So much has changed in one hundred years but not the things that really matter.  
Duty, selflessness, moral courage: always there remain the mark of a decent human being.  
They did their duty; now, let us do ours.*

Excerpt from the ANZAC Centenary Speech (25<sup>th</sup> April 2015) by the Hon Tony Abbott, MP

*When thinking about all the history that we are making today and even just the stories of our lives, I find it disheartening to imagine that what we will leave behind for our future generations may be a collection of digital media and database records. We should refuse to leave posterity with such fate. Instead, we must persevere to hand down heritage.*



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# Letter From Washington

Back with my Mates - 22 May, 2015



The Editor with Barry Goldwater, Senator from Arizona who stood for President in 1964. The editor was in the polling booth that November, and actually pulled the lever which recorded the vote of the other person in the booth.

'I'll be there.' The phone call last May had been positive and short. 'We rang you first, Al, and will use your positive response to chase up the rest of the Class to see who will be coming to the reunion, to draw some of our mates out of their Colorado caves.' Ten months later, and many an exchange of emails, some two hundred of the Class of 1965 started to move towards Bethesda, Maryland, a fifteen minute drive from the nation's capital. It was quite a big thing that I was about to do, a quick little twenty four hour flight from Melbourne to Washington, just to see a few mates. Several came from Colorado, including home roomer Jane with whom I had been Facebooking in recent years.

Into the mini-bus from Dulles (not Dallas) Airport with the usual chatty passengers and we shared a funny discussion about bureaucracy. 'That's why I only come back to Washington occasionally,' said a respected international journalist. The astrophysicist handed me his card as he now teaches macrame to physics students and planning sessions in large corporations.

Then as we passed the Iwo Jima Marine Memorial at Arlington, my heart beat a little harder, then my mind clicked into gear and my mobile phone quickly found Professor Google's list of bagpipers in the Washington area. My new best friend agreed to come to the Memorial the next day at 2pm and let me use his bagpipes. After all, it was the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea, wherein Australia was involved for more reasons than one, in many ways, alongside our ally. Regrettably, it is very hard to take my own bagpipes overseas because of the Canberra bureaucracy.



One of Melbourne's respected characters for so long, the late Martin Clemens, had served with the British Forces at Guadalcanal as a Coast Watcher alongside the Americans and he had become an Honorary Marine. Martin rang me one day to ask if I could play the US Marine Corps Hymn on the bagpipes. I said yes though I could not, however, I knew the tune well and Professor G provided the script which I quickly learnt, practicing at dusk out in Yarra Park. I would regularly on a Sunday go and play that tune at his home, and have a whisky. Martin was an inspiration to many. (You could google Alistair Urquhart playing the bagpipes at the Iwo Jima Memorial).

In Washington, a wonderful Australian friend shared a professional and social coffee as we discussed her skill of helping Australia's businesses as they come to work alongside larger American firms. We have previously met in various parts of the world.

Then an old school chum of the Junior Year who had dated my American brother talked about America and Australia today. It was a warm up for the next four days of the reunion.

I had a meeting with Australia's ambassador to the United States, The Hon Kim Beazley AC; that's with a z if you are going to email him! Fifty years previously, as Australia entered the Vietnam War alongside the Americans, and with one of my classmates a Danish exchange student, I had been at a formal dinner of senior Washington people when I was astonished to hear that perhaps Denmark was the eighth most important friend of the US and Australia came in at about fifteenth. Kim and I discussed this, with perhaps a general summary being that in some sectors, Australia would be much closer to the top but not perhaps so much in South America and some other places.

Kim finishes his role later this year, I think. A Great Australian. The Australian Embassy building itself was largely covered at the front as if some repairs were underway. However, it is more than repairs, and evidently the architects are working on something brand new.



Then dinner with a Navy admiral friend who had had a senior naval engineer Melbourne posting for some years who is now involved in drones and robots. Most of that discussion was about Australian wine, in one of a row of restaurants in Arlington, Virginia, just as in Melbourne. Arlington, where Confederate soldiers dined back those years ago, so close to the heart of Union decision-making.

Joe provided some figures. Washington is more than the iconic buildings that we all know. It has a city of some 700,000 inhabitants, mostly African-Americans (that is the polite modern word), with 3,500,000 folk next door in Maryland and Virginia. It has a city centre and surroundings which has many similar characteristics to Melbourne: commercial and public buildings including health, science and education, roads and avenues and parks and trees, and Memorials; also lots of beggars and even more signs than Melbourne about what you can and cannot do.



Another school friend who had lived opposite me those fifty years ago, took me for a drive through our then local village of Potomac. Many houses had disappeared and in their place had arisen chateaux. Horses are now banned in the community, though lots of deer continue to roam in the streets and lawns and aced gardens. Village Potomac has not quite been totally swamped by the urbanization of DC.

Thursday night. I had arranged to arrive a day early so that Mike and I could have a warm up chat. He had driven me to the end of year Prom, so he was a serious mate, and as I walked into the informal bar at the convention centre/hotel, not thirty miles from DC, in the village of Potomac, on the edge, naturally, of the Potomac River, the very village where I had lived with my adopted family those years ago, I could see Mike's white hair up at the bar. I was wearing my Whitman letter jacket, I had been the school running expert! I approached the bar with some difficulty, as three people interrupted me to see which Whitmanite I was, and we all shared a few

wonderful screams. We talked for a few hours and met for breakfast.

The American themes started to develop, or accelerate, in my mind. War. War. And more wars as they continue. The Vietnam War in some ways separated many Americans from an existing national common culture. Even several class members who served in Vietnam were not in favour of that war. This war mixed in with flower power.

Back in 1965, I had caused a slight tremor in the school community, and I was told that white exchange students did not take out black girls. Wise support came from several people and places, and we were both just more careful as we continued our relationship.

The 'black' issue remains. Many have moved on, but the media, does much to create anger and frustration and misunderstanding and hate. The police have an immediate role as communities become agitated or active and worse. I am not an expert in the statistics. Parts of America are white, some are black in particular in the cities. Central Americans and the Carribean in the Florida region. Mexicans in Texas and Arizona.

Who lives where? It is not only the African-Americans, most of whom historically were dragged to the the US, many other people who are not white continue to arrive from around the world. A DC taxi driver was, I presumed an Afro-American as we spoke, but he explained that he had recently arrived from Ethiopia on a special diversity visa. I correctly guessed that my next taxi driver had the same visa from the same place.

Other social issues such as euthanasia, gay rights (we discussed why, and how, one of our schoolmates had taken his life) and abortion, significantly but not totally divide the Republicans from the Democrats. The Tea Party part of the former, focus the glare onto these issues.

And of course welfare and health. Those who reflect and focus on where the money comes from, for whom and when. And those that don't. And education.

Some hundred of us visited the School, which had been rebuilt since our time, and were spread around many classes after briefings from the Principal and some of the interesting students. Naturally, I gave an Australian flag to the Principal, but had to represent it as everyone wanted to be in the photograph.

Friday evening was back at the Bar, about eighty of us, and it was necessary to work the room about as hard as any of us have ever worked a room. We had a name tag along with our photo from the 1965 Saga Year Book. This helped in some cases but



not always. Sometimes the name alone was enough. Sometimes a pretty smile could be seen through a few wrinkles, a few pounds more or less or a different hair style. Many had kept relationships and friendships over the years. But not with everyone. Sometimes we had to sit down with Saga (several of us brought them) and just chat through those days and these days and in between to tune in on our old friends.

At that time, ninety per cent of 550 students in the senior class went to university, all over the US, many to the top universities, as Whitman was then, as google says it is today, one of the cleverest schools in the US. (How lucky or how challenging a situation I was dropped into.) And following on from that, many alumni became academics at least partly during their careers. Many into Government. Defence. Engineers. Some successful in business. No Senators or Congressmen!

Saturday we talked through a Picnic in the Park. I was able to help put the pouring machine onto the Budweiser barrel. My attempts to throw the boomerang that I had bought were not as good as a forty year South Carolinian lawyer, who won the boomerang prize.

By Saturday afternoon, number plates for Florida, California, Massachusetts and every state in between crowded the entrance area.

One main event was a discussion where two groups of fifty spread over two rooms to discuss our thoughts on the sixties and

where to from here. There was quite a bit of sadness as to a bright future for America, that group of social issues that were much too slow in being resolved. As a convenor, I sought tears and smiles. There was plenty of both. Where is America. Not there yet!



The main gig, a Saturday dinner dance with a large band followed pre-dinner drinks, was made a little mournful for a while as the names were called of some seventy of our alumni who had passed on, including two gals that I had dated those years ago.

Could our Class dance? Some brought spouses. The band's 60's tunes and songs. Our Class had strength in many skills and many rose to the occasion to dance at this incredible event with physical skills they had not used for many years. The band did not drown out the talking. Two of my running mates, Track, met on a hill in Vietnam in 1967 and after quick hugs, the young infantry officer with men down the hill discussed how his friend, an

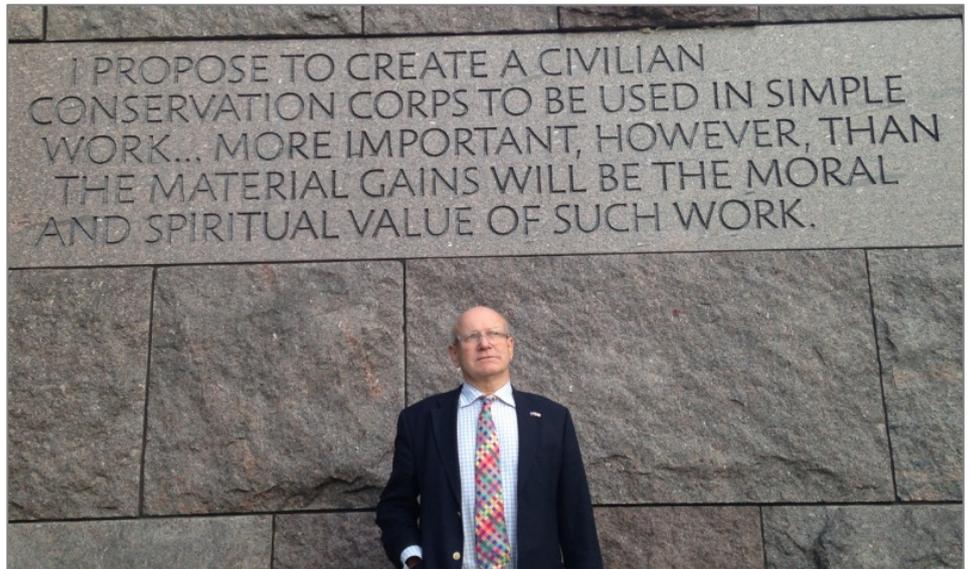
officer who was assisting an artillery colonel on the other side of the hill, could better time some of the shelling. Another in this group detailed how the nuclear submarine Scorpion sank to the bottom of the Atlantic with total loss of life, as the result of a trash disposal unit jamming at the wrong time.

We all had our lists of people for whom we were searching. One lovely history teacher that I knew well at the time was there, bit of a long hand-shake. I am not really good at hugging friends as so many Americans do.

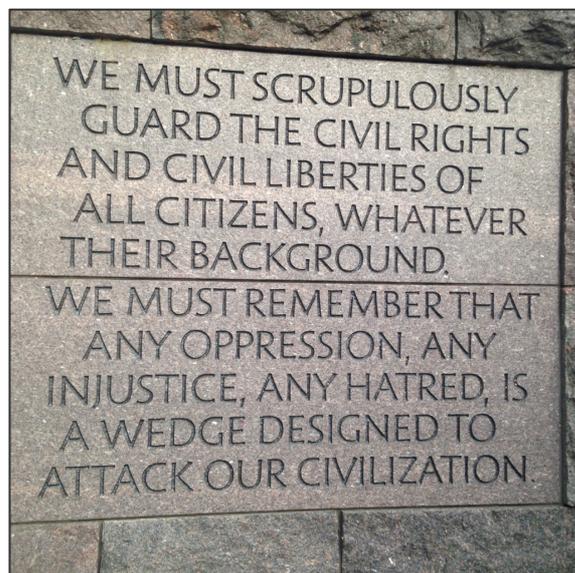
And then came Sunday and the farewells started but the long distance traveler and several others of us lingered on a day. We had more tales to swap and a few more questions to be answered. And even after day four we were digging further into our various characters, careers and wives.

Mike and I jumped in his car and drove to his New Jersey home, for a quiet night, only to end up talking long into the night. At one moment, I almost bit my tongue off as I started a sentence about Vietnam. I just stopped mid-sentence, Mike had been the sole survivor in a Vietnam creek when his eight navy crew died, and his wife had interim advice that he was dead.

On the way back home, I stopped in New York to see family and a couple of professional friends, then on to Cleveland for more family then Phoenix for more (American) family including my wonderful American mum from all those years ago. A quick look the Grand Canyon then home to the best city in the World. I had filled up my pockets with Australian American keyhole flags and koalas key rings. I sprinkled these across the wonderful U S of A.



It is now time for reflecting on just how good Australia is.  
 There is room for improvement!  
 As I write this last sentence,  
 it is the same mood as when I wrote a piece  
 on my return from my fortieth Reunion!



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