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Victoria Needs Action - Not Good Intentions

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Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — I do not think the government has ever had any problem being open about what it intends to achieve; unfortunately it just has not been quite as open about what it has not achieved.

Here we go again: the annual silly season, squandering precious parliamentary debate time on the Premier's self-indulgent, self-congratulatory annual statement. In the whole document there is not one word about the real concerns of Victorian families.

It seems only yesterday that we were debating the 2009 statement, and in terms of parliamentary sitting days it is because it was only about three days ago. Perhaps as a consequence this year's statement has sunk without a trace. I suspect it has more to do with the lack of content in the 2010 statement than the recent debate on the 2009 statement, but there we go. It lasted less than 24 hours — it perhaps only lasted 12 hours — and it was treated with the contempt it deserved by the people of Victoria.

To my surprise the Brumby government has proven even more inept than the government of Steve Bracks and even more wedded to the notion that talking is the same as doing. What this statement should be about is actions, not intentions. The Leader of the Opposition indicated that a coalition government would replace this particular piece of trite self-promotion with a statement on Victorian families because that is what coalition members are in this place to do — to improve the state, to grow the state and to ensure that all Victorians share in the benefits.

This is the third annual statement, and hopefully it will be the last because it is a perversion of the tradition of the Governor's speech. It is the Premier's failed attempt to don a cloak of respectability through the device of this attempt at a lofty statement. It is yet another example of the government's corruption of our political institutions and its intent to politicise and twist the Westminster system to serve the narrow partisan interests of the ALP and the narrow partisan interests of its mates. This government has only one intent: to use every trick and every manoeuvre in the book to say or do whatever it takes to cling to power in this state, regardless of the damage it does to Victoria.

The history of the statement is quite interesting. The first one of course was 52 pages and was titled *Delivering for Victoria*. Last year it was a considerably bigger document, but the name persisted, despite it being clear that the claim that the government was delivering for Victoria was totally unsustainable.

This year we have a new name; apparently now it is all about the future. I imagine that that was a decision forced on the government because one would have to talk about the future, having so conspicuously failed to deliver, as claimed in the last two statements. But of course the people of Victoria will not forget that failure to deliver. They will not forget that John Brumby and his government could not deliver even basic services that are required for everyday life — the basic services in public transport, the basic services in health and the basic services of freedom to walk the streets without fear that you will come to some form of harm — despite having 10 years and record budgets to drive the delivery of those basic services.

Of course any review of the history of the statement should not overlook the fate of last year's statement. It languished on the notice paper — untouched from 5 February until the Leader of the House moved an ignominious notice of motion to read and discharge that particular order of the day. The government's manipulation of the Parliament should have ensured the opportunity to debate the statement; it simply chose not to. We had 48 sitting days in 2009, none of them after midnight — and that was the first time that had been the situation for six years — and we considered only 95 bills. Given that the government had the power to bring it on and plenty of time to do it, why did we not discuss it? It was simply because the Premier is only interested in his grand statements; he is only interested in spin. If the statement had come back for debate, it would have been clear that the government had failed to implement its agenda; it would have been clear that this was an exercise in hollow promises, and the hollowness of those promises would have been clear for all to see.

A couple of days before that discussion, on 9 December, I suspected that it might be the case that the statement would not in fact come back and I would not have an opportunity to speak on it, so I raised a member's statement on the subject. I now want to review a few of the intentions that failed to get up: the member for Doncaster has talked about the failure to produce the promised ministerial statement on mental health; we have also had the failure to deliver the promised statement on early childhood development; we have not yet seen the green economy jobs action plan or the promised blueprint for regional growth; there is also supposed to be Council of Australian Governments agreement on health funding; and if you think nothing else is urgent for the government, the state of our hospitals is surely something that should command its attention immediately, but there has been no delivery on that either.

There has been no delivery on the future energy strategy, or on the promised international educational strategy, and of course that was revisited on the front page of the *Age* today, with the headline 'India blasts Victoria on violence' — two failures encapsulated in one headline.

However, on a reading of the Premier's previous statement one would think a totally different outcome had been achieved, and there it is again, that word — outcome. I think the member for Benalla summed it up pretty well in his member's statement this morning. That is why the Public Finance and Accountability Bill is such a shocker — it is a fuzzy, opaque way of measuring outcomes. They can be interpreted in any way you like.

Governments have to be accountable, and they need to be genuinely accountable. They need to set proper targets, they need to have proper benchmarks and they need to have proper reporting. This government will never do that while it can get away with dressing up as a huge success the abject failure that was the 2009 statement. If government members were serious about this exercise, if they really believed their own spin, they would set themselves proper targets. They would include in the statement a schedule of parliamentary consideration. They would publish a forward government business program. They would set hard dates for the introduction of bills and hard dates for the commencement of second-reading debates. They would program adequate parliamentary time to debate bills properly without the guillotine.

If such a process were set in place it would allow timely community consultation and allow all members of the Parliament to participate in and contribute to the program. There was not one word in the statement about the concerns of my community on the Mornington Peninsula.

My community is sick and tired of the failure of the government over 10 years to implement an adequate public transport system on the peninsula — to provide a convenient, regular and connected system.

They are tired of the continued failure to properly maintain our local roads and the failure to commence and achieve necessary intersection upgrades and the installation of traffic lights, a requirement of growing populations.

My community is tired of the failure to take proper precautions for the fire season. I must say the Country Fire Authority through the local brigades in the Western Port region has driven striven valiantly, despite the government's best efforts, to prepare the peninsula for the fire season.

People in my community are tired of the failure of the planning system to deliver an urban environment that is consistent with the wishes of the residents and to prevent constant incursions into the green wedge. They are tired of the failure to understand that constantly undermining the integrity of the planning controls weakens the whole system.

They are tired of the debacle that is the rollout of smart meters and the process that continues to work against the installation of photovoltaic cells and other forms of renewable energy.

And they are tired of the constant physical assaults in the urban centres on the peninsula and in Frankston and the total failure of the government to bring violent crime under control. They are sick and tired of waiting hours for ambulances, sometimes days in emergency departments, and months and even years for elective surgery.

The Premier's statement is a cynical, self-indulgent, self-promoting and ineffectual exercise. It will do absolutely nothing to undo the neglect of the past 10 years, and it has been received with the contempt it deserves.
