

Herald Sun EDITORIAL

Keep off the grass

FOR years experts have warned that marijuana is dangerous. Mostly the warning has fallen on ears unwilling to listen.

Today's version of cannabis is much stronger and thus more dangerous.

Yesterday the *Herald Sun* revealed the tragic consequence of using it and the terrible risks of dismissing it as an acceptable recreational drug.

Victoria's mental health clinics have been swamped by hundreds of young people with psychosis induced by the drug. Other mentally ill patients are being turned away.

This is a terrible rebuff to those who argue that cannabis should not be illegal.

Victoria's mental health experts brand the present state of affairs as a cannabis induced psychosis epidemic.

Even for those who escape marijuana's mind-bending ability to induce psychosis, it saps motivation.

Nonsensically, while Victoria's law bans children of any age buying tobacco, it does not prohibit them buying bongos used for smoking cannabis. The Health Department says it may review the law.

Those who see the end results hope this is not another official pipedream.

Another hold-up

THE Bracks Government is nothing if not consistent: whenever something is crying out for action it promises to look into it.

The police want Victoria to follow New South Wales and introduce tough laws to deal with people who arm themselves with the intention of committing violent crimes.

The Victoria Police armed offenders squad is believed to have written a report to the Government outlining its concerns that the law as it stands is inadequate.

This follows a case in which a bandit who was disguised and had a shotgun was acquitted of attempted armed robbery despite his lawyer admitting he was there to do the hold-up. Under the law as it stands, all he could be convicted of was theft and possession of the gun.

Judge Bill White described the circumstances of the case as "quite frightening".

Attorney-General Rob Hulls said he would consider the issue.

This is the familiar mirror option. After reflecting, Mr Hulls must act to end this legal anomaly.

Plod accounting

THE Victoria Police administration has refused to reveal how much taxpayers' money goes on food, travel and other expenses for its top officers.

The force's denial of 11 requests by the *Herald Sun* under Freedom of Information laws was based on the claim that it would take too long to get the information.

It says it would take 40 working days to retrieve, inspect and copy the claims over the 15 months to April this year.

The public would be justified in asking what hope the force has of tracking down criminals to protect the community, if in this age of the computer, its own records are really in such a muddle.

But even allowing for this inefficiency, the public has a right to the information the *Herald Sun* sought.

Like the \$180,000 spent by Transport Accident Commission chief executive officer Stephen Grant on travel and expenses over four years, it is taxpayers' money.



Steve Fielding

SMALL business is the backbone of most economies.

Australia is no different. More than one in four Australian workers is employed in businesses that have fewer than 20 people.

We all have an interest in the health of small businesses because our prosperity depends on it.

I have some idea of the issues that face small business because that is where I come from, and from a highly regulated industry at that.

I also know a bit about families. My wife Susan and I have three kids and I come from a large family myself.

I am one of 16 kids. I know how important security is in the lives of families.

I know how important it is to be able to plan and not have to live from week to week.

This is the experience I bring to bear when I examine the Government's workplace changes.

I understand the challenges from both sides of the fence and what I shall try to do is find a balance between the needs of both groups.

Most small businesses do the right thing and it is not in our interests to make life any harder for them than it already is.

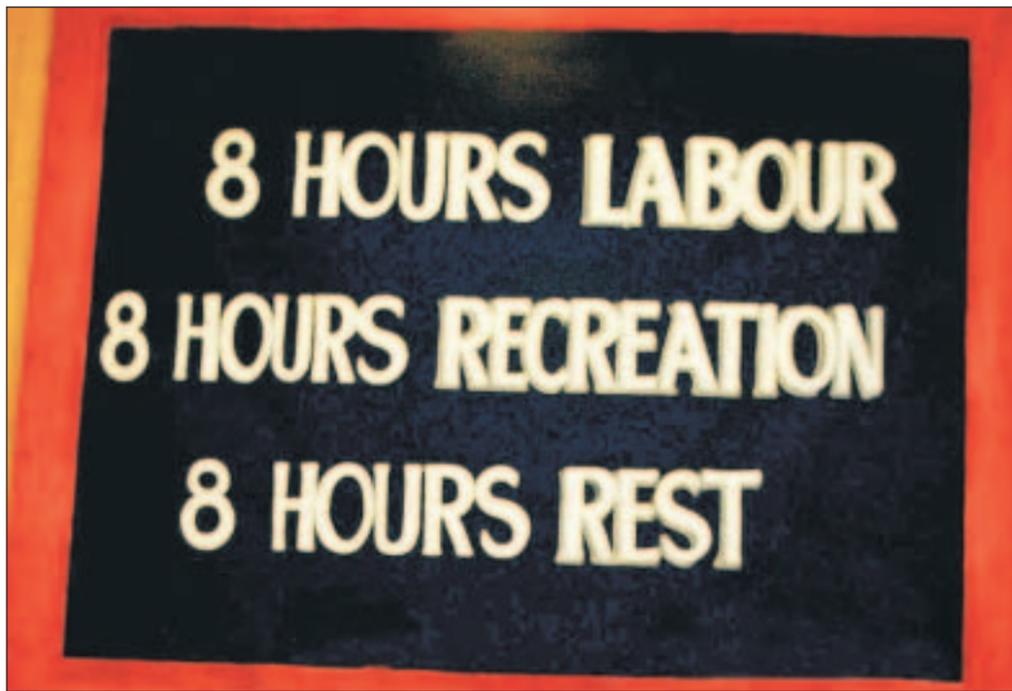
On the other hand, we must protect workers from those employers who have no qualms about exploiting them.

There is no place for extremists, whether they represent employers or employees.

However, values matter. The idea of the eight-hour day might seem like old hat because it is now about 150 years old.

However, I think that most families would love the idea of eight hours work, eight hours rest and eight hours leisure.

Sue and I certainly would, as would the people I met last Monday when I went to Fountain Gate Shopping Centre and



Old values: the sign at Trades Hall.

Why family comes first

asked shoppers and small business owners their thoughts on the Government's changes. They did not want the flexibility Peter Costello talked about last week.

They did not vote for John Howard so that they would have to bargain for benefits they already enjoy.

THEY also do not want to be forced to work longer hours than those they are already working.

Overtime and penalty rates were introduced to achieve the eight-hour day.

They were not introduced to reward workers for working longer or anti-social hours.

Rather, they were intended to discourage employers from employing workers for more than eight hours a day.

Penalty rates and overtime are not achieving that purpose any more.

Some employers are not wor-

ried about the size of their wages bill, while penalty rates and overtime are holding other employers back, particularly small businesses.

In dealing with this problem, we have to be careful that we do not throw out the baby with the bath water. We do not want to create a situation in which an employer could force workers to work seven days a week and 12 hours a day.

New ways must be found to achieve the ideal that was won more than 100 years ago, and we now have an opportunity to come up with those new ideas.

Australia deserves no less. Just as small business is the economic engine room of the country, so families are the foundation of our society and the key to our future.

There is no point tinkering with the engine room if the foundation is undermined along the way.

Some might say that I am biased. And I am. I've benefited from growing up in a family and am now lucky enough to have a terrific wife and three great kids of my own.

What we must not do, however, is to take propaganda at face value.

Today it is fashionable for employers to talk about family-friendly policies. But how real are they?

JUST a few months ago I couldn't believe comments by the managing partner of a top legal firm who said you don't have a right to any free time.

We have to understand the difference between family-friendly policies and market-friendly policies.

For me, the choice is clear.

STEVE FIELDING is a Family First senator for Victoria

Cheer up Kim, whingers are losers

AS the joke goes, Martin Luther King's famous speech was "I have a dream", not "I have a complaint."

I remembered this as I listened to Kim Beazley address a small group of senior business people in Sydney last week.

Kim Beazley is probably the smartest guy in the room, even though this group includes graduates from Yale, Harvard and Princeton.

Like Bob Hawke and Bill Clinton, Kim is an Oxford-educated Rhodes Scholar, so he has brains.

Unlike Hawke and Clinton, famous for their ability to establish instant rapport with people, Beazley fails to connect with people.

I like Kim Beazley. Or, at least I want to. But he makes it difficult.

For example, in addressing our gathering of worldly business executives, he delivered an impersonal, stultifying, uninspired message.

Actually, it was a 30-minute negative tirade about John Howard whom he blamed for everything from foreign debt to global warming.

Howard is out of touch with Australia, rants Beazley, as if Howard became Australia's second longest serving prime minister by accident.

Duff Watkins

Truth is, Howard wins elections — lots of them — precisely because he is in touch with Australia. It's Kim who is sadly out of touch.

On this day, not only did he misread his audience, he delivered the wrong message to the wrong crowd.

How bad was it? Let's just say that people burst into sleep. As Kim read his speech, mouths yawned open and eyelids slammed shut. It was torrid and tedious.

Kim's reply to a question was so verbose that even the woman who asked it stopped listening to the answer.

Through it all though, I took notes and found Kim's speech to be cogent but unbearably negative.

Does he really believe that a half-hour harangue of John Howard will reap a political payoff? Isn't the Leader of the Opposition supposed to articulate positive alternatives?

My poll of those attending confirmed that his speech was seen as uniformly negative.

Not one positive alternative was put. No better ideas were advanced. None, zero, zilch.

This is significant because humans crave optimism.

Psychologist Martin Seligman analyses campaign speeches for their optimism content and then predicts election outcomes.

Seligman once predicted correctly 25 out of 29 US Senate elections, including five out of six upsets.

He was more accurate than any other forecaster.

He found that in 22 US presidential elections Americans chose the more optimistic-sounding candidate 18 times.

In all elections where the underdog won, they were the more optimistic candidate.

Seligman's point: most elections are won by the more optimistic candidate.

My point: voters want to hear optimistic words about the future and will support candidates who offer hope.

That's why *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale has sold more than 20 million copies in 42 languages.

People support that which encourages optimism in the face of adversity.

In politics, pessimism is bad. It induces apathy, low voter turnout, and larger protest votes.

People who lose faith in the political process drop out. That's when extremist parties prosper.

Perhaps it's easier to be optimistic when you're ahead in the polls.

But this month Kim Beazley celebrates 25 years in politics.

With all that experience, education, and ability, he ought to know that the best way to stay in touch with Australian voters is to espouse positive policies that motivate our support.

LIKE Martin Luther King, I too have a dream. I dream of a time when politicians will quit carping and communicate positively.

I long for the day when our leaders respect Australians as the positive and optimistic people that we are.

I yearn for the moment when the smartest guy in the room is not held captive by political minders.

Australia needs optimistic alternatives, not pessimistic put-downs.

Until then, thanks for coming Kim, and stay in touch.

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Dr DUFF WATKINS is managing director, Cornerstone Australia, and president of the Yale Club of Sydney

DEATHS ON OUR ROADS

THIS YEAR	LAST YEAR
214	216

Victorian deaths in 2005, compared with the same day last year.