Hello Ladies and Gentlemen:

Last week the Prime Minister announced significantly increased funds for both government and independent schools.

The main short-fall in expenditure for government schools is in capital, and we can all point to difficulties which have occurred in many schools throughout Australia.

Up to the present time the Commonwealth has assisted by providing funds for science laboratories and libraries in all schools. Now, for the first time, a specific sum of $20 million is being made available to the States for primary and secondary school buildings and related facilities.

Victoria's share of this sum is just over $5 million, which should add quite significantly to the $30 million which Victoria spends each year on new school construction.

I have regarded additional capital funds for government schools as a high priority since I resumed this portfolio a few months ago.

These increased funds will be provided by an increase to the interest-free capital grants which the Commonwealth makes to the States as part of their total works and housing programme. These capital grants are paid to the States to help them finance non-productive capital works without incurring any debt charges on the funds used. The grants are paid without any matching conditions attached to them. The Commonwealth does expect the States to maintain their own levels of expenditure on school construction. The funds made available in these special grants can be spent up to 30 June next year.
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This will give the States time to gear up to the additional expenditure.

Since 1969 the Commonwealth has been supporting the running costs of independent schools, as do the States. The running costs of government schools have risen by 30 to 40 percent and even more in the years since 1969. It now costs over $300 a year to educate a child in a government primary school and over $500 per head in a government secondary school.

The general financial assistance grants which the Commonwealth provides the States represent about one half of the States' current budget expenditure and thus it could be said that the Commonwealth supports approximately one half of the current expenditure by the States on primary and secondary schools.

The increased costs in independent schools have been even greater than those in government schools because many independent schools were paying salaries below those in government schools and recent awards have made it necessary to bring salaries up to the same levels.

From these increases in the payments made by the States to independent schools over the last two years, the government believed that a number of independent schools would be facing a critical situation from the beginning of the next school year in the sense that a number of schools might be compelled to close and, in other cases, a number of children refused admission to independent schools because of lack of space. This would not only harm the independent system, it would also place greater pressure on the government schools in the areas affected; and so the government has increased its payments from $35 to $50 a head in primary schools and from $50 to $68 a head in secondary schools. These increases will cost just under $10 million in a full year.
The government would like to see established a situation in which the independent school system can continue to educate that part of the school population which has traditionally sought education in independent schools. Its policies are designed to improve the quality of education in all schools.

In this instance, after discussions with a number of State Ministers, the Commonwealth believed that the greatest shortage in the government sector was for additional capital funds. These have been provided. We also believed the greatest shortage in the independent sector was for additional funds for running costs and we have acted on both counts.

A good deal of publicity was given to the fact that Mr Justice Kerr was appointed to undertake a review of parliamentary salaries. As many differing views were expressed about his recommendations, the Prime Minister decided that no action would be taken on salary increases during the life of this Parliament.

You will recall that in the last Session of Parliament, there was a considerable outcry because the Government used what is known in Parliamentary terms as the guillotine, and a large number of Bills were put through the Parliament in a very short space of time.

Even though these Bills were not contentious, even though they were largely supported by the Opposition, there was a widespread view that this ought not to happen.

During the winter, the Prime Minister had appointed me to a Government Members' Committee to make recommendations that would make sure we avoided this situation for the future. The Prime Minister had also asked that the Public Service and Ministers look to proposals that would help in this situation. Well, the last session ended quietly. Certainly we had some reasonably late nights, but there was no great rush and there
was plenty of time for the debate of the important matters.

The proposals that were made both from the Committee I chaired and from other areas have, I think, proved successful and this is shown in some figures.

In the Spring Session, 72 Bills passed both Houses, as against 65 in the Autumn Session. There were 450 sitting hours, compared with 300 in the Autumn. A good deal more work was accomplished with less fuss.

One of the interesting statistics during the session was the presentation of nearly 600 petitions. In the Autumn Session, there were only 137. Nearly 30,000 visitors attended the House of Representatives in the public galleries during the time the House was sitting.

I hope that on future occasions the Parliament will be able to get through its business as smoothly and as effectively as it has, this time.

This is the final broadcast which I will be making until Parliament resumes again in the New Year for the Autumn Session. I wish you all a merry Christmas and look forward to speaking to you again in 1972.