



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 20 March 2025

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O'Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024 to 18 November 2025)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025 to 13 October 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John ⁷	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Berham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim ⁸	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁹	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam ^{5,6}	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ¹⁰	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel ¹¹	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Sworn in 4 March 2025

⁸ Resigned 6 January 2025

⁹ Resigned 7 July 2023

¹⁰ Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹¹ Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,

Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

CONTENTS

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion and orders of the day	1127
DOCUMENTS	
Documents	1127
BILLS	
Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024.....	1127
Clerk's corrections.....	1127
MOTIONS	
Motions by leave	1127
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Michael 'Kicka' O'Rourke.....	1128
Rosebud Theatre Group	1128
Avondale Heights Community Garden.....	1128
Filipino Seniors and Carers Support Group of Gippsland.....	1128
Morwell electorate schools	1129
Latrobe Youth Space.....	1129
International Women's Day	1129
Ramadan.....	1129
Twelve Apostles precinct development	1129
West Gate Tunnel	1130
Flinders Christian Community College.....	1130
Mornington electorate community safety	1130
Watsonia Primary School	1130
Euroa electorate telecommunications	1131
Drought preparedness	1131
Holi Festival of Colours	1131
Elevation Secondary College	1132
Construction industry	1132
Kubilay Genç	1132
Vietnamese Museum Australia	1132
Duck hunting.....	1132
Eltham Jazz Festival.....	1133
Walking Football 4 Health	1133
International Women's Day	1133
Prahran electorate community safety	1133
Bass Valley Primary School.....	1134
Bellarine electorate sports facilities	1134
St Luke's Primary School, Lalor.....	1134
Ghana Independence Day	1135
Bridge Mall redevelopment	1135
ResearchED Ballarat	1135
Next Gen 2025	1135
Ramadan.....	1135
Qaim Foundation iftar dinner	1136
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	1136
BILLS	
Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025	1136
Statement of compatibility.....	1136
Second reading.....	1144
Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025	1145
Second reading.....	1145
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Crime	1177
Ministers statements: Pride events	1180
Bail laws	1180
Ministers statements: major events	1182
West Gate Tunnel	1183
Ministers statements: public transport	1184
Health system.....	1184
Ministers statements: maritime infrastructure	1185
Construction industry	1186

CONTENTS

Ministers statements: recreational boating and fishing.....	1187
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Brighton electorate	1188
Mulgrave electorate.....	1188
Gippsland East electorate.....	1189
Ashwood electorate	1189
Rowville electorate.....	1189
Bellarine electorate.....	1189
Mildura electorate.....	1189
Lara electorate.....	1190
Broadmeadows electorate.....	1190
Prahran electorate	1190
BILLS	
Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025	1191
Second reading.....	1191
Third reading.....	1214
Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024	1214
Second reading.....	1214
Third reading.....	1216
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Sessional orders	1216
MOTIONS	
Education policy	1248
BILLS	
Bail Amendment (Tough Bail) Bill 2025	1277
Council's amendments.....	1277
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Adjournment	1286
Postponement.....	1286
ADJOURNMENT	
Housing.....	1286
Community safety	1287
Bendigo Livestock Exchange.....	1287
Melton electorate fuel prices	1288
Auburn Primary School	1289
Music education.....	1289
Education funding	1289
Renewable energy	1290
Timber industry	1290
School saving bonus.....	1291
Responses	1291

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1127

Thursday 20 March 2025

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:33): General business, notices of motion 17 and 45 to 71 and order of the day 7, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986 – Report on the Actuarial Investigation of the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme as at 30 June 2024

Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 – Register of Interests – Returns submitted by Members of the Legislative Assembly – Ordinary Returns 31 January 2025 (two volumes) – Ordered to be published

Statutory Rule under the Confiscation Act 1997 – SR 5

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 5.

Bills

Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024

Clerk's corrections

The SPEAKER (09:34): Under joint standing order 6(1), I have received a report from the Clerk of the Parliaments that she has made the following corrections in the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024. Clause 55, as amended by the Council's amendment 4 and agreed to by the Assembly, replaces subsection 10D(1) of the Control of Weapons Act 1990. The Clerk has omitted the double quote mark at the beginning of the insertion and inserted single quote marks at the beginning and the end of the insertion. The corrections ensure that the words and expressions inserted by Council amendment 4 are appropriately inserted into the bill.

Motions

Motions by leave

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes with horror that Israel has resumed its indiscriminate bombing in Gaza and has killed almost 500 people in 48 hours in attacks that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said are 'just the beginning';
- (2) notes that the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia has written to MPs in this house urging us to take immediate actions to stop the genocidal war and forced displacement against the Palestinian people; and
- (3) calls on this government to end all diplomatic, military and economic ties with Israel until it complies with international law.

Leave refused.

Members statements**Michael 'Kicka' O'Rourke**

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:36): I rise this morning to honour Michael 'Kicka' O'Rourke, who passed away on 12 March 2025 after a courageous battle with cancer. Mick's dedication to the Rye Football Netball Club spanned over six decades, making an immeasurable impact on both the club and the broader Rye community. Mick served as president for 22 years, vice-president for 21 and remained on the committee in 2025, demonstrating unwavering commitment to the club. On the field he played 342 games, including 113 senior matches, and was known for his toughness and leadership. Mick was recognised with life membership from both the AFL South East commission and the Mornington Peninsula shire, a testament to his extraordinary contribution. The Rye community has lost a true legend, but his legacy will live on. Rest in peace, Kicka.

Rosebud Theatre Group

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:37): I also want to rise to express my deep concern regarding Rosebud Theatre Group's forced removal from the Rosebud Memorial Hall. Following safety concerns raised by the Mornington Peninsula shire, RTG has been left without a venue for rehearsals, performances or storage, facing unsustainable costs and uncertainty. Despite assurances, the council has failed to provide meaningful support, leaving this vital community group in limbo. I urge the council to work with RTG to secure a temporary venue, storage solutions and a clear timeline for their return, ensuring this inclusive theatre group continues enriching our community.

Avondale Heights Community Garden

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:37): I had the pleasure of heading down to a hidden gem in my electorate on Sunday, the Avondale Heights Community Garden, for their very special open day. It was very cold and very wet, but the organisers persisted, and there were plenty of umbrellas. It was a wonderful event for everyone and part of the family of our local community – food, kids activities, live music, lots of produce and homemade crafts to purchase. The event on Sunday was fantastic. The coffee van was a key feature given how cold it was last Sunday.

The event hosted stalls run by community groups to share information on what they are passionate about and ways for people to get involved. One such community group that was present was the information stall hosted by Moonee Valley Sustainability, an environmentally focused group. They are ensuring that our local community's flora and fauna stays protected for the whole community and constituents can enjoy it for many generations to come. There was a resident beekeeper reminding us all of the complicated process required for one of our favourite treats as well as much knowledge on the garden and lots of things to see – a thriving garden. The big highlight was Ellen James topping off the day with some musical stylings and some wonderful music right through the rain to ensure everyone had a good time. Thank you to the Avondale Heights Community Garden members for putting on such a great event. To the volunteers, to Jane Canaway the secretary and to Sam Fichera the president, you have done a great job at the Avondale Heights Community Garden. It really is a hidden gem in Avondale Heights, and it is one of those community gardens that will pay off for many generations to come.

Filipino Seniors and Carers Support Group of Gippsland

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:39): Last week I was able to attend the Filipino Seniors and Carers Support Group for their Harmony Day event. It was lovely to catch up with president Mercy, and on the day it was a luncheon, and as the Filipino community do, they make all their own food and bring it in. We had some lovely cultural dancing and entertainment throughout the day. They have a full week of these festivities, so to Mercy and her wonderful band of helpers, thank you very much.

Morwell electorate schools

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:40): Last week I also got to visit a few schools for school captain, leadership award and badge presentations. Lumen Christi School out at Churchill were actually in Parliament the week before, in our last sitting week, so it was great that I could actually catch up with them in Parliament and have a bit of a chat. Stockdale Road Primary School in Traralgon also had their school captain and leadership awards. Traralgon South Primary School also had their school leadership and captain awards, so it was great to be able to get out and present their badges.

Latrobe Youth Space

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:40): Latrobe Youth Space, which is a great diversionary program for our youth in Morwell and the Latrobe Valley, had a lovely dinner. It was great to be able to attend there with them.

International Women's Day

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:40): Last sitting week I was pleased to host a visit to Parliament of students from local schools in my electorate in celebration of International Women's Day. The IWD visit was a wonderful opportunity to show these young girls that they can dream big and aspire to leadership in whatever roles they choose in the future. They got to talk with the Premier Jacinta Allan and the Minister for Women Natalie Hutchins about the importance of girls and women supporting one another in very practical ways. A noteworthy discussion point was about the impact of male role models and how they can create a respectful environment for girls and women. I want to thank the students from Mill Park Secondary College, The Lakes South Morang College and Lalor North Secondary College who attended the event. Their teachers were also awesome in encouraging their participation.

Ramadan

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:41): I would like to express my gratitude to the Melbourne Diyanet and Turkish Islamic Society of Victoria for co-hosting the annual Turkish iftar dinner during this holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan is a significant sacred month in the Islamic calendar observed by many Muslim Victorians. Through fasting, this time is a means to cultivate self-discipline, empathy and gratitude. I was so pleased to meet many members of Melbourne's Turkish community, both new and longstanding, and to share this sacred time together. My heartfelt thanks to the Consul General of the Republic of Türkiye in Melbourne Doğan İşık and community leader Sucettin Unal for their invitation, and Natalie Suleyman made a wonderful contribution also.

Twelve Apostles precinct development

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:42): The secrecy at the Twelve Apostles has to stop. This government has been sitting on \$126 million since 2018 for the upgrade of the Twelve Apostles visitor centre. The construction has now begun at the Twelve Apostles. The local Corangamite shire knows nothing of the project. The local tourism authority, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, knows nothing of the project. The next-door neighbours know nothing of the project. The local traders, businesses and tourist operators within the Port Campbell region know nothing of the project. It is absolutely incompatible with common sense and good government that a major piece of community infrastructure – a \$126 million investment in regional Victorian tourism – can be done in secret. This is a community asset. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a focal point that will help generate tourism for the rest of our wonderful Otways and Great Ocean Road region, yet this government has secrecy agreements. They will not communicate to the public what is being done. The public, the community, do not know how many car parks. They do not know how many shops. They do not know how many restaurants. They do not know if the long-running sewer issues and waste

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

1130

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

issues at the Twelve Apostles precinct will be dealt with. The secrecy must stop. The government must come clean and tell the community what they are doing.

West Gate Tunnel

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:43): I rise today to thank the community of South Kingsville, Spotswood and Altona North for their patience during the West Gate Tunnel works. This has seen Blackshaws Road and the surrounding streets become clogged with traffic and trucks that have been diverted because of the tunnel works project. I would like to thank every single resident who has reached out to let me know what is occurring in local streets.

I have done a number of things. I have asked the department to make the traffic light sequencing change on Melbourne Road and Williamstown Road to give us better throughput of traffic. I have asked the department to also establish a temporary pedestrian crossing on Blackshaws Road to make sure that pedestrians, particularly families with young children, can cross safely. I have sought advice from the City of Hobsons Bay to see if we can expedite pedestrian crossings that are a requirement of the housing developments on Blackshaws Road. Finally, the Department of Transport and Planning has dropped the speed limit from 60 kilometres an hour to 50 kilometres an hour.

Whilst works on the West Gate Tunnel Project have been incredibly disruptive, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Once the project is complete at the end of the year, there will be permanent truck bans 24/7 on Blackshaws Road from Millers Road to Melbourne Road and on Hudsons Road from Melbourne Road to Hall Street, and these bans are law. We are putting cameras on those roads so we can enforce these bans. It will take thousands of trucks off local streets and really transform our neighbourhoods. It will make our streets safer. I will continue to work for better road safety.

Flinders Christian Community College

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (09:45): It was fantastic to take part in the 2025 Flinders Christian college political civics program alongside the Labor and Libertarian members for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region and Niall Waring representing a faux far-left candidate. We were asked questions such as: if you could make any law in Australia or change the law, what would it be? Students got to vote on first appearance after about 30 minutes of questions and then after knowing the names of parties. I came last, unfortunately, after coming first last year.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Chris CREWTHER: I know, member for Narracan. Thank you to Michael McLean and all the students who took part.

Mornington electorate community safety

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (09:46): Also, I attended a community forum hosted by the fantastic member for Flinders Zoe McKenzie MP and Jason Wood MP, my former colleague at the federal level, which also included Cr Paul Pingiaro, Cr Kate Roper, president of the Police Association Victoria Sergeant Karl David APM and so many others. Sadly, criminal incidents on the Mornington Peninsula have gone up 29 per cent in the last year. Urgent action is needed. Thanks to Zoe and her team for organising such a crucial forum. It is so important that all levels of government, federal and state, and the community work hand in hand to prevent and stop crime.

Watsonia Primary School

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:46): I want to wish Watsonia Primary School a very happy 65th birthday. On 2 February 1960 Watsonia Primary School opened its doors, and ever since it has been at the very centre of community life in Watsonia.

One of the many vivid stories of the early days of Watsonia Primary School is how the school sports oval was created. One of the first students was from a dairy farm on Grimshaw Street, so when the school decided it needed an oval this student's father was called in with his Ferguson tractor to level out the ground and students had the job of picking up the rocks, going backwards and forwards, that were left behind. This story is a great example of the community spirit at Watsonia Primary School.

Today it is still a wonderful place of learning – great teachers, great leadership, great students, great families and, can I say, great facilities. I am really pleased that our government recently completed and upgraded the school to reimagine an old school building, to build a new one and to build better outdoor facilities. I would like to particularly give a shout-out to principal Paul Johnson and the school council, including president Megan Pricter, who are well and truly carrying on this community spirit to today. I also want to mention previous principal Jeanette Martin, who was passionate about the school and students. This Saturday the school celebrates with a history exhibit and a big open day with food, fun, music, classic cars and much more. Have a great birthday, Watsonia Primary School.

Euroa electorate telecommunications

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:48): This week I wrote to the federal Minister for Communications raising the urgent concerns my community has about the widespread telecommunications failures happening in the region. This issue has persisted for several years and has been made worse by weather events such as floods, storms and bushfires, all of which create significant risks to public safety. Disruptions have resulted in prolonged mobile and internet blackouts and have left residents unable to make emergency calls, receive critical updates and contact family and friends. This has also impacted the ability of our emergency services to effectively operate during disaster situations. Many businesses and essential services have also been affected, with EFTPOS and ATM failures preventing access to basic necessities. Reliable telecommunications are vital to daily life and are especially crucial during natural disasters. Large areas of my electorate, particularly Redesdale, Pyalong, Euroa, Nagambie and Avenel, continue to experience inadequate Telstra coverage, which is the only provider available in so many regions.

Drought preparedness

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:49): I also recently attended a livestock drought maintenance information session in Euroa with about 80 farmers, something incredibly necessary as climate conditions worsen across our regional areas. Gathering with local farmers, we discussed ways in which we can be better equipped to handle the lack of rain and ensure our farmers can survive. The ongoing drought is taking a serious toll on farmers in regional Victoria and leaving them desperate for rain. Please put your washing on the line, because farmers are facing both financial strain and emotional exhaustion.

Holi Festival of Colours

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:49): I was thrilled to recently attend, along with the terrific member for Greenvale, the Hume Holi festival at Anzac Park in Craigieburn. It was also very fitting that this event held on International Women's Day was organised by the team of outstanding women at AWA, the Australian Women's Association. Thank you again to Raj Mann, Pooja Punjabi and Kiran Sood, who once again made this great event happen in our community. These outstanding women arrange these local festivals so that our wonderful diverse community can join in celebrating days of such cultural significance. Thank you also to the sponsors who help make these events possible and to the traders and services that attended. Well done to all who performed and entertained the crowds throughout the day and into the night. There was plenty going on, with all the stalls, the rides and the food available – there really was something for everyone. It is always terrific to see so many people come together to catch up with family and friends and celebrate important events. Add the bursts of coloured powder that covered everyone in attendance and you really do have a very special day of love, laughter, celebration and joy. Well done to everyone involved, and happy Holi to all who celebrate.

Elevation Secondary College

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:50): On another matter, I recently raised the Elevation Secondary College 2024 David Williamson writing competition, and in offering my congratulations to the participants I inadvertently missed the contribution by Asra Aden. I can assure Asra that I also enjoyed her short story *Our Second Life*, an emotional tale of a proud young Australian soldier and his final resting place. Well done, Asra.

Construction industry

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:51): It is no secret in this chamber that I am pretty passionate about the construction industry, and nothing disturbed me more than watching *60 Minutes* on Sunday night and what has happened and the lack of action that actually has occurred. It was very disappointing that in July last year we tried to introduce police checks on government building sites. If we look at the footage from Sunday night of that poor woman getting kicked by her partner and we hear the report about the guy that locked the woman in the shed – he had been released from jail for threats to kill and stalking women – it makes me wonder what it will take for this government to do something. We brought this in because I want to see the industry cleaned up. I want police checks on government building sites. It is no use standing in this chamber saying, ‘We feel sorry for them that this has happened.’ How about the government actually do something? Good members of the CFMEU, good men and women of the CFMEU, are at risk. I do not know what it will take for this government to get it through their head. Bring in police checks in the CFMEU. If you want to get rid of corruption, bring in police checks. If you want to get rid of the criminal element, bring in police checks. If you want to protect women in the CFMEU, bring in police checks.

Kubilay Genç

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (09:52): It is with great sadness that today I rise to mourn the passing of Kubilay Genç. Kubilay was a pillar of the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot community in Victoria. For more than 50 years Kubilay dedicated his life to service and community. His work touched so many people from so many backgrounds right across the Victorian community. He leaves a legacy of compassion and commitment to all. I do send my condolences to his family and friends and to the broader community. May he rest in peace.

Vietnamese Museum Australia

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (09:53): On another matter, it was a very historic weekend. We broke ground on the first-ever Vietnamese museum in Australia, being built in the heart of Melbourne’s west. This year is especially important as we mark the 50th anniversary of the Vietnamese settlement in Australia – a milestone that highlights the incredible journey for this community and in particular the contribution they have made in my electorate of St Albans. We have seen so many taking part, contributing and supporting the Vietnamese Museum Australia. I do want to also point out the Allan Labor government was proud to deliver \$8.7 million. Thank you to everybody, in particular to St Albans’s Vietnamese businesses, Andy Ho, Ca Lan Chenh, Selena and many others, and Tammy Nguyen and Bruce Mildenhall from VMA. This is an exciting time this year.

Duck hunting

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:54): Thirty-five years ago the Western Australian government banned duck shooting. Thirty years ago the New South Wales government banned duck shooting. Twenty years ago the Queensland government banned duck shooting. Two years ago a parliamentary inquiry here in Victoria recommended that Victoria ban duck shooting immediately, but what did this Labor government do? They continued it. Not only that, but this year they have expanded the season,

made it longer and allowed people to kill more ducks every single day. Make it make sense, because it is just baffling to me how this Labor government continues to allow people to cruelly kill our native waterbirds just for fun, particularly when the vast, vast majority of Victorians do not support this practice and it has been banned in almost every other jurisdiction. We are consistently seeing our waterbirds threatened. We have many, many species of native waterbirds here that are on the threatened species list, yet every year they end up killed as part of duck-shooting season. It is absolutely ridiculous and cruel that this Labor government continues to pander to the less than 1 per cent of the population who want to shoot waterbirds for fun when the vast, vast majority of Victorians do not want to see this cruel practice continue. On behalf of the millions of Victorians who want it banned, just ban it.

Eltham Jazz Festival

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (09:55): What a great weekend of hot music, dancing, food and sun. Congratulations to all involved in creating another successful Eltham jazz, food and wine festival. Music and food fans from near and far came down to Eltham town square to enjoy amazing live music performances, entertainment and a wide range of food and drinks produced by local stallholders, cafes, bars and restaurants across our vibrant town centre. I especially want to recognise the efforts of the volunteer committee: Michael, Fee – and congratulations on your marriage, Fee, during the festival – Michael S, Debora and all of the crew involved in setting up this extraordinary two-day event. The festival is only made possible thanks to their hard work. Some of these volunteers have been working on this event for 20 years or more, and our community is hugely thankful.

Walking Football 4 Health

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (09:56): I want to give a shout-out to the walking football tournament recently held at Diamond Valley Sports and Fitness Centre. This game is great fun, with all the joy of soccer without the worry of rough play, bumps or running. The family-friendly sport is open to everybody in the community, getting involved regardless of age, gender or ability. If you have the opportunity, I encourage everyone to get down to the next local game. I would like to thank Michael Trim for the invitation and for his impassioned advocacy in working around this state to kickstart this game and create an accessible activity that helps more people get active and social. I also want to add that when I tried walking football not so long ago I scored a goal, so if I can anyone can.

International Women's Day

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (09:57): This year there were amazing events recognising International Women's Day, including the recognition of our first female responders here in Parliament, and I thank the Speaker for her leadership in creating this event.

Prahran electorate community safety

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (09:57): During the Prahran by-election voters made it clear that we urgently need to address rising levels of crime and antisocial behaviour. The crime rate in Prahran is three times higher than the state average. Serious criminal acts like firebombings of shops, home invasions and a machete attack on Chapel Street have made media headlines. Every person deserves to live their life in safety and without fear, but local residents and traders in Prahran constantly tell me they feel unsafe and at risk. Women, who make up 52 per cent of my electorate, feel particularly vulnerable. The state government must act immediately to provide the safety and security that Prahran locals deserve and expect.

Local police are run off their feet. They need additional resources to provide more visible police presence across the area and particularly on busy streets like Chapel Street and Toorak Road. CCTV is an important tool in modern policing, and it is not good enough that our area has to share very

limited CCTV resources with other local councils. Funding is urgently required for more mobile CCTV units that can be exclusively used in our area to help police rapidly respond to criminal activities as well as helping them to identify and arrest offenders. The government cannot simply talk tough on crime but then fail to deliver like they have done with botched bail laws and delayed machete bans. Action needs to be taken now to reduce crime and make our area safer.

Bass Valley Primary School

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (09:58): First via video, now on the public record, soon in person – hello, Bass Valley Primary. A massive congratulations to the ever so wonderful and inspiring young leaders who recently received their badges at the whole-of-school assembly: school captains Rosco and Charli L; house captains Clancy, Chanel, Riley, Skye, Emily, Coby and Charlie C; and specialist captains Matilda, Bridget, Isabella, Ally, Marcus, Milla, Shaylah, Taio, Alice, Rory, Aaliyah and Caity. You all do a remarkable job, leading by example with kindness, positivity and care, looking out for others and being that person that every student from prep to your peers can go to for help, guidance and to ask questions and even directions. You have such good listening skills to hear their amazing ideas to make your school and community shine even brighter. Stepping up as leaders can sometimes be tricky too. You cannot please everyone all the time and do everything for everyone. There might be difficult choices to make along the way, but that is okay. There are big people around you, like your teachers, parents and guardians, who are there to listen and support you. Always strive to be your best, as is your school motto. Be curious, be kind, be problem-solvers and help other kids to feel included and be their best too. I know you will speak up if someone is not showing respect or kindness to others. I cannot wait to see what you all do from here. Congratulations.

Bellarine electorate sports facilities

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (10:00): This Allan Labor government continues to invest and support sports participation across the Bellarine community. Upgrades are currently underway to improve the facility at Portarlington Recreation Reserve, home to the Portarlington Football Netball Club, cricket club, Bellarine Agricultural Society, tennis and pony clubs and many more other organisations. Safety upgrades are progressing at the Collendina Reserve, making it safer for members of the Ocean Grove Cobras Junior Football Club and the Collendina Cricket Club, as well as their families and opposing teams. This safety upgrade will make sure that the entrance and moving around the reserve is improved. Wallington Reserve, home of the Wallington Cricket Club and the Bears baseball club, are having their pavilion upgraded to improve their all-abilities access. Barwon Heads Football Netball Club also have funding to redevelop their clubrooms and female change rooms. Excitingly, we also will start later this year on the North Bellarine Aquatic Centre. We are supporting Bellarine to have healthy and active communities, and a big part of this is to listen to what facilities are needed.

I meet with many community members, though, who are advocating for more indoor sporting facilities in the Bellarine, particularly for basketball, pickleball and badminton. The Regional Community Infrastructure Sports Fund is a great opportunity to work towards this, but I have been very disappointed to learn that the City of Greater Geelong has not applied and taken this opportunity for funding for indoor sport facilities. It is a missed opportunity, but I will continue to advocate on behalf of my electorate and work with clubs to ensure all avenues are explored.

St Luke's Primary School, Lalor

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (10:01): It was a great pleasure to visit St Luke's Primary School to talk with grade 4 students and teachers. Students have been studying civil society and democracy, and we talked about rules and how laws are made. Students' knowledge on the subject was very impressive, and I got more than one curly question. As we talked it was obvious to me that St Luke's teaches its Christian values throughout the curriculum: care for others, social justice, concern about the environment and the dangers of deforestation for the planet, as well as the need to follow laws and rules to keep us all safe. We also talked about laws and rules and how sometimes they

could be unfair and need to be changed. Thank you, Ms Elizabeth Persichetti, grade 4 teacher, for the invitation, and also to principal Ms Bernadette Venables.

Ghana Independence Day

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (10:02): Happy Ghana Independence Day. On 6 March 2025 I celebrated the 68th anniversary of independence from British colonial rule with Victorians of Ghanaian background and friends. To Francis Acquah, thank you for the invitation and for organising the day along with many volunteers. Francis also recently received an Order of Australia for all the volunteer work that he does, as well as for his great contributions and support in the area of mental health.

Bridge Mall redevelopment

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:02): The Bridge Mall in Ballarat is an important part of my family's history, with two generations of traders running small businesses at opposite ends of Bridge Street. My dad Les Dickinson was a pharmacist and operated his chemist shop for decades at 10 Bridge Street, and my grandfather, another Les Dickinson, operated Gullen's Newsagency at 88 Bridge Street. I was so pleased to join in the reopening celebrations on Saturday. Well done to the City of Ballarat, the Bridge Mall traders and everyone involved in delivering this transformative project for our important shopping precinct.

ResearchED Ballarat

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:03): It was great to be back at my old school, Ballarat Clarendon College, on the weekend for the annual researchED conference. It was a privilege to join 425 educators from across Ballarat and the nation to learn more about evidence-based teaching and learning practices that will support Victorian students to thrive in their schooling and beyond. I particularly enjoyed hearing, from keynote speaker and my former colleague Dr Greg Ashman, how cognitive load theory can enhance teaching and learning.

Next Gen 2025

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:03): I am proud to be a sponsor of the Art Gallery of Ballarat's *Next Gen 2025*. This exhibition showcases the best artwork created by students from government, Catholic and independent schools from Ballarat and the south-west region. The annual showcase of VCE work gives talented young artists the opportunity to have their extraordinary works exhibited and in doing so celebrates their vision, their ideas and their skills.

Ramadan

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:04): We are in the heart of Ramadan, and what better way to celebrate in the community than attending an iftar dinner. I know that many people on this side of the chamber have attended many iftar dinners over the last week or so and, going forward, will continue to do so until we hit Eid in a week's time. I must, first of all, acknowledge the incredible team at the Ahmadiyya Muslim community women's association, the east chapter, who hosted me for a women-only iftar last week. It was absolutely beautiful. We had a great panel of guests from all sides of politics. We shared some great learnings with each other, and then of course broke the fast with an incredible meal, always very well enjoyed by many members of the community.

I also want to give another big shout-out to the Abu Talib centre, where on Sunday I again had a magnificent meal with a group of women – many of them my friends, many of them going to the local schools. I will say that I had a very intriguing group of four little eight-year-old girls who quizzed me: 'Are you a Christian or a Muslim? Do you wear that scarf all the time?' They also did ask me if I was a Karen, and I wondered what that actually meant. The eight-year-olds gave me a great description of what they thought a Karen was, and we had a really great time and we enjoyed it.

Qaim Foundation iftar dinner

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (10:05): Following on with the iftar theme, I must say it was my absolute pleasure to host an annual iftar dinner at the Qaim Foundation. This is the second time we have held this iftar dinner. The first time was last year under President Rehan. This year it is being carried on, and it is a tradition that we look forward to hosting each and every year. We bring people of all faiths together to celebrate this very auspicious occasion, and it is our absolute pleasure to do it in Kororoit. I encourage anyone keen to come next year to please join me.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:06): I move:

That the consideration of government business, notices of motion 1 to 9 inclusive, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:08): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 (the **Bill**).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I have this opinion for the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

This Bill amends the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* so that the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Scheme, also known as the Victorian Energy Upgrades (VEU) program, can continue to support energy efficiency in Victorian households and businesses. The Bill does this by extending the operation of the VEET Scheme to the end of 2045, allowing the VEU program to provide incentives for mandated upgrades, increasing the flexibility of Victorian Energy Efficiency Certificate surrender deadlines and providing the regulator, the Essential Services Commission, with a range of new and expanded enforcement tools to encourage and enforce compliance with the Act and regulations made under the Act.

The VEET Scheme regulates the participation of accredited persons and scheme participants. These entities are often businesses, body corporates and sole traders. However, to the extent that accredited persons and scheme participants are natural persons, the following amendments in the Bill may engage human rights contained in the *Charter of Human Rights Act 2006*:

- The prescription of several existing, and new, requirements under the VEET Act as civil penalty requirements for the purposes of the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001*.
- The new proposed power of the Essential Services Commission to issue an improvement notice to former or current accredited persons and scheme participants, or persons that hold themselves out to be acting under or in accordance with the VEET scheme.
- The new proposed power of the Essential Services Commission to issue a prohibition notice to scheme participants, or persons that hold themselves out to be acting under or in accordance with the VEET scheme.
- The new requirement for scheme participants to undertake training and provide evidence of that training to the accredited person they are undertaking the prescribed activity or regulated action on the behalf of, before undertaking that activity or action.

- The inclusion of new matters the Essential Services Commission may consider when determining whether a person applying for accreditation is a fit and proper person and new grounds on which the Essential Services Commission may suspend or cancel a person's accreditation.
- The new proposed power of the Essential Services Commission to require an accredited person to provide consumer information in, or attached to, a Victorian Energy Efficiency Certificate.
- The expansion of information that the Commission (or a person authorised by the Commission) may divulge or communicate to accredited persons.

Human rights

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are as follows:

Right to freedom from forced work (section 11)

Section 11 of the Charter provides that a person must not be held in slavery or servitude, or made to perform forced or compulsory labour. 'Forced or compulsory labour' does not include work or service that forms part of normal civil obligations.

Right to privacy and reputation (section 13)

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have that person's privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be therefore lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

The fundamental values which the right to privacy expresses are the physical and psychological integrity, the individual and social identity and the autonomy and inherent dignity of the person. The right to privacy may be engaged in circumstances where there is a sufficient impact upon a person's capacity to experience a private life, maintain social relations or pursue employment.

Section 13(b) of the Charter relevantly provides that a person has the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. An 'attack' on reputation will be lawful if it is permitted by a precise and appropriately circumscribed law.

Right to property (section 20)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or the common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely.

The Charter does not define the term "property" and very little Victorian jurisprudence exists with respect to the meaning of "property" under the Charter. The rights recognised as possessions under the European Convention on Human Rights may inform how a court will understand property under section 20. Patents and licenses have before been recognised as possessions.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24(1))

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The concept of a 'civil proceeding' is not limited to judicial decision makers, but may encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests. The right may be limited if a person faces a procedural barrier to bringing their case before a court, or where procedural fairness is not provided. However, the entire decision-making process, including reviews and appeals, must be examined in order to determine whether the right is limited.

Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

Section 25 of the Charter provides a number of rights related to criminal proceedings. Subsection 25(1) provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. Subsection 25(2)(k) provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled without discrimination to not be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt (referred to within this Statement as the protection against self-incrimination).

Right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26)

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which he or she has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with the law. The right is relevant where legislative provisions may impose trial and punishment more than once for the same

offence. However, the right does not prevent other non-penal consequences from flowing from the same conduct that gave rise to a criminal conviction and punishment. The right must consider whether the provision is penal in nature rather than the type of proceeding involved.

Human rights issues***Civil penalty requirements: clauses 16, 23, 30, 33 and 36 of the Bill***

Clauses 16, 23, 30, 33 and 36 of the Bill all amend the Table in Schedule 1 to the VEET Act. That Table, as provided for by section 40B of the VEET Act, sets out civil penalty requirements for the purposes of the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001*, in addition to the regulated entity the civil penalty requirement relates to and the civil penalty amount.

The clauses of the Bill described above provide for some existing, and some new, requirements contained in the VEET Act to be civil penalty requirements. This applies the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* enforcement and civil penalty regime to the provisions of the VEET Act specified as civil penalty requirements in the Table in Schedule 1 to the VEET Act. The enforcement and civil penalty regime provides the Essential Services Commission with a range of civil enforcement tools. Some of these requirements are also current or new offences under the VEET Act.

Right to not be tried or punished more than once (section 26)

To the extent that the new civil penalty requirements are also existing or new offences, these clauses engage the right to not be tried or punished more than once under section 26 of the Charter, as on the face of the clauses, there appears to be a possibility that a natural person who has been tried and finally convicted of an offence may be subsequently tried for a civil penalty and/or subject to a civil penalty order for the same underlying conduct.

However, in my view and as explained below, the right not to be tried or punished more than once is not limited by clauses 16, 23, 30, 33 and 36.

First, section 54K of the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* prohibits a court from making a contravention order against a person if the person has been convicted of an offence constituted by conduct that is substantially the same as the conduct alleged to constitute the contravention.

The right may also be engaged because criminal proceedings can be commenced after a contravention order has been made against a person for substantially the same conduct, as provided by section 54M of the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001*. However, section 54N of that Act provides that the same evidence used in the proceedings for the contravention order is inadmissible in evidence in that subsequent criminal proceeding.

Further, section 40D of the VEET Act expressly provides that a contravention of a civil penalty provision is not an offence.

Moreover, any civil penalty imposed by a court under the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* does not serve a punitive or penal function, as section 54(2) of that Act requires a person who is subject to a civil penalty order to pay the civil penalty amount into the Essential Services Commission Enforcement Fund, which supports the regulatory functions of the Commission (section 54ZQ(b) of that Act).

I am therefore satisfied that the prescription of existing and new requirements under the VEET Act as civil penalty requirements for the purposes of the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* does not limit the right to not be tried or punished more than once.

New improvement notice power: clause 20 of the Bill

Clause 20 of the Bill inserts new section 40AB into the Act, which introduces a new power for the Essential Services Commission to issue an improvement notice to a person who is or was at any time an accredited person, is or was at any time a scheme participant, or has at any time held themselves out to be an accredited person or a scheme participant or otherwise to be acting under or in accordance with the VEET scheme.

The Essential Services Commission may only issue an improvement notice if it believes on reasonable grounds that the person is contravening or has contravened a provision of the VEET Act or the regulations in relation to the undertaking of a prescribed activity, or the undertaking of a regulated action in relation to a prescribed activity, or if the person in undertaking a prescribed activity has provided an appliance, equipment or service that has caused or is likely to cause harm to human health or safety, or damage to property.

It is an offence to not comply with the notice and compliance with the notice is a civil penalty requirement.

Right to freedom from forced work (sections 11(2), 11(3)(c))

The right under section 11(2) is engaged by the new improvement notice power, because a person subject to one of these notices may be required to take any action that the Essential Services Commission reasonably

considers necessary to remedy the contravention or anything causing the contravention or to remedy the activity that has caused or is likely to cause harm to human health or safety or damage to property. This could be viewed as requiring a person to perform forced or compulsory labour.

However, in my view the right to freedom from forced work is not limited, as any labour required under these provisions would from part of normal civil obligations and is therefore specifically excluded from the scope of section 11(2) by section 11(3)(c) of the Charter.

I am therefore satisfied that the right to freedom from forced work in section 11(2) of the Charter is not limited by clause 20 of the Bill.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24)

The right to a fair hearing under section 24 of the Charter may be engaged by the new improvement notice power, because a broad reading of the right may encompass the decision-making procedures of administrative decision-makers, such as the Essential Services Commission.

The right to a fair hearing is concerned with the procedural fairness of a decision.

The power to issue an improvement notice under new section 40AB of the Act as inserted by clause 20 requires the Essential Services Commission to provide the affected person with the grounds on which the notice is given and the date the person must comply with the notice, in addition to other information as specified in section 40AB.

I note that the Essential Services Commission is not required to give the affected person prior notice that they will be subject to an improvement notice, nor does it provide an opportunity for a person to provide reasons to the Essential Services Commission as to why the notice should not be issued. In my view, any limitation to procedural fairness and therefore the right to a fair hearing caused by the absence of prior notice or opportunity for the affected person to provide reasons is justified, as this will enable the Essential Services Commission to act quickly, including to mitigate safety risks to the community and remedy contraventions of the Act and Regulations.

Further, any limitation caused by the absence of an ability to provide reasons to the Essential Services Commission as to why the notice should not be issued is reasonable, as a person can apply to the Essential Services Commission for an internal review of the decision and to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for review of the decision, as provided for in clauses 21 and 22 of the Bill. The requirement to comply with an improvement notice does not apply during any period that the operation of the relevant notice is stayed by the Tribunal.

Further, an improvement notice does not in and of itself impose a penalty. While it is an offence under new section 40AB(5) inserted by clause 20 of the Bill to not comply with an improvement notice, and compliance with this requirement is also a civil penalty requirement, prosecution of an offence or the commencement of a civil proceeding by Essential Services Commission must comply with all relevant court processes and rules, which provides the affected person with procedural fairness.

Therefore, if a broad reading is adopted and the right to a fair hearing is engaged, I am satisfied that the right to a fair hearing is not limited by clause 20 of the Bill.

New prohibition notice power: clause 27 of the Bill

Clause 27 of the Bill inserts new section 40AC into the Act, which introduces a new power for the Essential Services Commission to issue a prohibition notice to a person who is or was at any time a scheme participant, or has at any time held themselves out to be a scheme participant or otherwise to be acting under or in accordance with the VEET scheme.

The Essential Services Commission may only issue a prohibition notice if it believes on reasonable grounds that the person is contravening or has contravened a provision of the VEET Act or the regulations in relation to the undertaking of a prescribed activity, or the undertaking of a regulated action in relation to a prescribed activity, or if the person has engaged in or proposes to engage in an activity that has caused or is likely to cause harm to human health or safety, or damage to property and, having regard to the nature of the contravention or the activity, prohibiting the person from undertaking a prescribed activity or a regulated action is necessary to prevent harm to human health or safety or damage to property.

Further, new section 40AE provides for the Essential Services Commission to, on its own initiative, revoke a prohibition notice or vary a prohibition notice if the Essential Services Commission receives or otherwise becomes aware of information that relates to the grounds on which the prohibition notice was issued and was not known to the ESC at the time the notice was issued.

It is an offence to not comply with the notice and compliance with the notice is a civil penalty requirement.

Right to freedom from forced work (sections 11(2), 11(3)(c))

The right under section 11(2) is engaged by the new improvement notice power, because a person subject to one of these notices issued under section 40AC or amended under section 40AE may be required to take any action that the Commission reasonably considers necessary to remedy the contravention or anything causing the contravention or to remedy the activity that has caused or is likely to cause harm to human health or safety or damage to property. This could be viewed as requiring a person to perform forced or compulsory labour.

However, in my view the right to freedom from forced work is not limited, as any labour required under these provisions would from part of normal civil obligations and is therefore specifically excluded from the scope of section 11(2) by section 11(3)(c) of the Charter.

I am therefore satisfied that the right to freedom from forced work in section 11(2) of the Charter is not limited by clause 27 of the Bill.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24)

The right to a fair hearing under section 24 of the Charter may be engaged by the new prohibition notice power and the power to vary or revoke the notice, because a broad reading of the right may encompass the decision-making procedures of administrative decision-makers, such as the Essential Services Commission.

The right to a fair hearing is concerned with the procedural fairness of a decision.

The power to issue a prohibition notice under new section 40AC of the Act as inserted by clause 27 requires the Essential Services Commission to provide the affected person with the grounds on which the notice is given, what the person must not do, any actions the person must take and the date the person must comply with the notice.

I note that the Essential Services Commission is not required to give the affected person prior notice that they will be subject to a prohibition notice.

However, a person may apply to the Essential Services Commission under new section 40AD inserted by clause 27, to revoke a prohibition notice that applies to the person, to vary the period for which a prohibition notice applies, or to vary the action (if any) required by the notice. This application must include evidence of a relevant change in circumstances since the prohibition notice was issued and evidence demonstrating that the person is suitable to undertake the conduct the notice prohibits them from undertaking. When making its decision, the Essential Services Commission must consider such an application, consider the information and evidence provided in the application and any conduct of the applicant when it issued the prohibition notice and then inform the affected person of its decision.

If the Essential Services Commission proposes to vary or revoke the prohibition notice under new section 40AE, they must give the person subject to the notice written notice advising of the Essential Services Commission's proposed action and inviting written submissions from the person affected, which the Essential Services Commission must consider before making the decision. Once the Essential Services Commission makes its decision, it must give the affected person notice of that decision.

In my view, any limitation to procedural fairness and therefore the right to a fair hearing caused by the absence of prior notice or opportunity for the affected person to provide reasons before an initial notice is issued under new section 40AC is justified, as this will enable the Essential Services Commission to act quickly and mitigate safety risks to the community.

Any limitation caused by the absence of an ability to provide reasons to the Essential Services Commission as to why the initial notice should not be issued is reasonable, as a person can apply to the Essential Services Commission to vary or revoke the notice and for an internal review of the decision and to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for review of the decision, as provided for in clauses 28 and 29 of the Bill. The requirement to comply with an improvement notice does not apply during any period that the operation of the relevant notice is stayed by the Tribunal.

A person can also seek an internal review and a review by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal of the Essential Services Commission's decision to not vary or revoke the notice upon application under section 40AD.

Further, a prohibition notice does not in and of itself impose a penalty. While it is an offence under new section 40AC(4) inserted by clause 27 of the Bill to not comply with a prohibition notice, and compliance with this requirement is also a civil penalty requirement, prosecution of an offence or the commencement of a civil proceeding by Essential Services Commission must comply with all relevant court processes and rules, which provides the affected person with procedural fairness.

Therefore, if a broad reading is adopted and the right to a fair hearing is engaged, I am satisfied that the right to a fair hearing is not limited by clause 27 of the Bill.

Right to privacy (section 13(a))

As discussed above, the right to privacy may be engaged in circumstances where there is a sufficient impact upon a person's capacity to experience a private life, maintain social relations or pursue employment. The new power to issue a prohibition notice that may prohibit the affected person from undertaking prescribed activities or regulated actions may engage the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter, because the person who is subject to the prohibition notice may be restrained from carrying on their business, or working as a scheme participant, which may impact their capacity to pursue employment.

However, in my view, any interference with the right will not be unlawful because it is authorised by an accessible and precise legislative framework, nor arbitrary, because it has a legitimate purpose of protecting community safety.

I am therefore satisfied that the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter is not limited by clause 27 of the Bill.

New requirement for scheme participants to provide evidence of training to accredited persons: clause 34

Clause 34 of the Bill requires a scheme participant to provide evidence to the relevant accredited person of the completion of mandated training under new sections 14FA(1) and (2), inserted by clause 34 of the Bill. Provision of this evidence is a civil penalty requirement.

Right to privacy (section 13(a))

To the extent that the information which a person must provide to the Essential Services Commission under clause 34 may contain personal information, this clause may engage the right to privacy in section 13(1) of the Charter.

However, in my view, any interference with the right will not be unlawful because it is authorised by an accessible and precise legislative framework, nor arbitrary, because it has a legitimate purpose of ensuring scheme participants are adequately trained and competent before undertaking prescribed activities and regulated actions in homes and businesses. This will in turn support consumers.

I am therefore satisfied that the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter is not limited by clause 34 of the Bill.

Power to consider additional matters in a fit and proper person test and competent and capable person test: clauses 18 and 25

Clause 18 inserts new section 10C(ga) into the Act, which provides for the Essential Services Commission to be able to consider whether an improvement notice has been issued to the person and, if so, whether the person has complied with the notice, when determining whether a person is a competent and capable person for the purposes of accreditation.

Clause 25 inserts new section 10B(k) into the Act, which provides for the Essential Services Commission to be able to have regard to a contravention by the person of section 40AC(5), when determining whether a person is a fit and proper person. New section 40AC(5), inserted by clause 27, makes it an offence for an accredited person to require or authorise any other person to undertake, on the accredited person's behalf, a prescribed activity of any part of a prescribed activity or a regulated action in relation to a prescribed activity if the accredited person knows, or reasonably ought to know, that the other person is prohibited from undertaking that prescribed activity or regulated action.

Section 9 of the Act provides that an application for the grant or renewal of accreditation must include a declaration that the applicant is, for the purposes of accreditation, a fit and proper person and a competent and capable person. The Essential Services Commission can require an applicant to provide evidence to support these declarations under section 10A and must refuse an application if the Essential Services Commission is not satisfied that the person is a fit and proper person, or a competent and capable person under section 11.

Existing section 14D goes on to provide that an accredited person must not, without reasonable excuse, fail to disclose to the Essential Services Commission any adverse matter within 14 days of becoming aware of that matter. An adverse matter means, if the Essential Services Commission were to have regard to it, the Essential Services Commission would determine the person is not a fit and proper person or a competent and capable person for the purposes of accreditation.

Right to privacy (section 13(a))

To the extent that the information which a person must provide to the Commission under existing sections 9, 10A and 14D due to the amendments contained in clauses 18 and 25 of the Bill may include personal information, these clauses may engage the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter.

However, in my view, any interference with the right will not be unlawful because it is authorised by an accessible and precise legislative framework, nor arbitrary, because it has a legitimate purpose of ensuring accredited persons are fit, proper, competent and capable to participate in the VEET Scheme.

Furthermore, existing section 65 of the VEET Act contains an important privacy safeguard, by making it an offence to disclose confidential information obtained during the exercise of powers or functions under, or in connection with, the VEET Act, except in limited circumstances.

I am therefore satisfied that the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter is not limited by clauses 18 and 25 of the Bill.

Presumption of innocence (section 25(1)) and protection against self-incrimination (section 25(2)(k))

Due to the amendments in clauses 18 and 25, an accredited person may be required under section 14D to disclose whether they have not complied with an improvement notice or contravened new section 40AC(5). It is an offence to not comply with an improvement notice and new section 40AC(5) is an offence.

It is therefore relevant to note that, while section 14D is an existing section of the Act, it engages the presumption of innocence because the ‘reasonable excuse’ exception places an evidential burden on a person accused of the offence. However, it does not transfer the legal burden of proof to the accused. Once the accused has adduced (or pointed to) evidence of a reasonable excuse, which will ordinarily be particularly within their knowledge, the burden shifts back to the prosecution to prove the essential elements of the offence. I do not consider that an evidential onus of this kind limits the right to be presumed innocent in section 25(1) of the Charter.

It is also relevant to note that section 14D of the Act engages the protection against self-incrimination, to the extent that a person may be required to disclose information which could tend to incriminate them, new section 14D may engage the protection against self-incrimination under section 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

In my view, however, the right is not limited because the duty to disclose is subject to a ‘reasonable excuse’ defence, which expressly includes under existing section 14E that that it is a reasonable excuse for the purposes of existing section 14D(1) for a person to refuse or fail to disclose an adverse matter within the meaning of that section if the disclosure of the adverse matter would tend to incriminate the person.

Additional grounds related to suspending or cancelling a person’s accreditation: 19 and 26

Clause 19 and 26 insert new sections 14(1)(ga) and (gb) respectively into the Act, which provide for the Essential Services Commission to suspend or cancel a person’s accreditation, or cancel a person’s accreditation and prohibit a person from applying for accreditation for a maximum period of five years, if the Essential Services Commission believes on reasonable grounds that a person has failed to comply with an improvement notice or has contravened section 40AC(5).

While section 14 is existing, meaning the Essential Services Commission already has the power to take the actions described above, as the Bill will add additional grounds on which the Essential Services Commission can exercise these powers, it is relevant to discuss the human rights engaged by section 14 as amended.

Privacy (section 13(1))

Restrictions upon a person’s ability to work may engage the right to privacy in circumstances where they have a sufficient impact upon a person’s capacity to experience a private life, maintain social relations or pursue employment. Therefore, clauses 19 and 26, amending section 14, may empower the Commission to interfere with a person’s right to privacy.

The additional grounds inserted by clauses 19 and 26 are appropriately tailored to the objective of enabling the Commission to ensure accredited persons are of good character and to protect the reputation and integrity of the VEET scheme. There are express time limits on suspension or disqualification in existing section 14.

Moreover, a person may apply for the Commission to reconsider a decision made under section 14 and apply to VCAT for review of any such decision. This offers further protection against any arbitrary interferences with privacy under section 14 as amended by clauses 19 and 26.

Property (section 20)

Insofar as an accreditation could be characterised as ‘property’ under section 20 of the Charter, the Commission’s powers to suspend or cancel an accreditation or account may be considered to affect a deprivation of a person’s property.

However, I do not consider that section 14 as amended by clauses 19 and 26 limit the Charter right to property because any deprivation of property made pursuant to the sections inserted into the VEET Act by those clauses will be ‘in accordance with law’. In particular, the detailed list of grounds pursuant to which the Commission may suspend or cancel an accreditation protects against arbitrary exercises of the Commission’s powers.

Fair hearing (section 24)

As discussed above, a person may apply to the Commission to reconsider any decision of the Commission under existing section 14 and may apply to VCAT for review of any such decision.

Therefore, if a broad reading is adopted and the right to a fair hearing is engaged, I am satisfied that the right to a fair hearing is not limited by clauses 19 and 26 of the Bill.

Power to require an accredited person to provide consumer information in, or attached to, a Victorian Energy Efficiency Certificate: clause 38

Clause 38 inserts new sections 21(4) and (5) into the Act, to provide that the Essential Services Commission may require a certificate to contain, or an accredited person to provide to the Essential Services Commission, the consumer's contact details, the address of the premises at which the prescribed activity was undertaken and the name, ABN and contact details of any scheme participant involved in the activity or regulated actions. A certificate must already contain the name of the consumer of electricity or gas.

This information that the Essential Services Commission may request under section 21(4) will already have been provided to the accredited person during the course of undertaking the prescribed activity.

The requirement to provide this information when requested by the Essential Services Commission engages the right to privacy with respect to the consumer of electricity or gas, and the scheme participant (if that scheme participant is a natural person).

In my view, any interference with the right will not be unlawful because it is authorised by an accessible and precise legislative framework, nor arbitrary, because it has a legitimate purpose of ensuring the Essential Services Commission is able to contact consumers and scheme participants where issues arise and monitor compliance with the code of conduct contained in Schedule 6 to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Regulations 2018.

Furthermore, any interference with a person's privacy will be modest, as there is a reduced expectation of privacy in the context of a regulated industry like the VEET scheme. Persons participating in the scheme do so voluntarily, and so any decision to disclose personal information to an accredited person is ultimately at the discretion of the consumer or scheme participant. In addition, in the Commission is a 'public authority' under the Charter, so it must act in accordance with human rights (including the right to privacy) when disclosing personal information (section 38 of the Charter).

Expansion of information that the Commission (or a person authorised by the Commission) may divulge or communicate to accredited persons: clause 51

Clause 51 substitutes existing section 66(1)(m) of the Act, to provide that that Division 3 of Part 8 does not prevent the Essential Services Commission or person authorised by the Essential Services Commission from divulging or communicating information to an accredited person for the purpose of informing the accredited person of the details of any improvement notice or prohibition notice issued to a person, a scheme participant's conduct when undertaking a prescribed activity or regulated action or a scheme participant's compliance with this Act and the regulations, in addition to the existing power to provide information to accredited persons regarding a scheme participant's compliance with the code of conduct.

To the extent that the information which the Commission may provide to these persons and bodies includes personal information, clause 51 will engage the right to privacy in sections 13(a) of the Charter. However, in my opinion, the right is not limited as any interference with privacy effected pursuant to section 66 (as amended) will be lawful, as the section is accessible and precisely formulated, and non-arbitrary.

To the extent that this information may constitute an attack on a person's reputation, clause 51 will engage the right to privacy in section 13(b) of the Charter. However, in my opinion, the right is not limited as any attack on a person's reputation will be lawful, as the section is accessible and precisely formulated, and for the purpose of ensuring that accredited persons can make informed decisions related to engaging persons who have been issued improvement notices or prohibition notices, or are prohibited from engaging in certain activities or from undertaking certain regulated actions under the VEET Scheme.

Furthermore, any interference with a person's privacy will be modest, as there is a reduced expectation of privacy in the context of a regulated industry like the VEET scheme. Persons participating in the scheme do so voluntarily, and so any decision to disclose personal information to the Commission is ultimately at the discretion of the participant. In addition, the Commission is a 'public authority' under the Charter, so it must act in accordance with human rights (including the right to privacy) when disclosing personal information (section 38 of the Charter).

Conclusion

I am therefore of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Energy and Resources

Second reading

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:08): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting Victorians with the cost of living, reducing emissions, managing the impacts of climate change and growing our economy. Supporting energy efficiency is at the heart of this approach, saving energy consumers money, making them more comfortable in their homes and businesses and reducing emissions from the energy sector. Energy efficiency schemes also encourage investment, employment and technology development in industries that supply goods and services which reduce the use of electricity and gas.

The Victorian Energy Upgrades (VEU) program is the largest energy efficiency scheme in the country. It is a major contributor to the achievement of Victoria's interim emissions reductions targets, established under the *Climate Change Act 2017*.

Since the program commenced in 2009, over 2.5 million households and businesses have participated in the program. To date, it has reduced Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions by over 88.1 million tonnes. In 2024, more than 488,000 households and 22,000 businesses received discounted energy efficiency products and services through the VEU program. On average, households that undertake energy efficiency upgrades under VEU save \$110 and businesses save \$3,700 on their annual energy bills. Businesses who have undertaken bespoke energy efficiency upgrades have saved tens of thousands of dollars off their operating costs, significantly reducing their emissions and their energy bills.

To date, the VEU program has created benefits for both participating and non-participating households and businesses through the reduced demand for energy brought about by improved energy efficiency, which puts downward pressure on retail energy prices. Between 2021 and 2025, the VEU program will avoid \$3.8 billion in energy system costs, so even those who do not participate in the program will save on their bills. The scheme has been a major contributor to Victorians enjoying the benefits of some of the lowest wholesale electricity prices in the national energy market.

A two-year strategic review of the VEU program is currently underway, with a particular focus on ensuring the program is fit for purpose for the future and can enable electrification at scale. This includes understanding any barriers to participation that households and businesses face, industry challenges, and the effectiveness of current regulation, metrics and activities. While the review will inform the VEU program's direction with interim findings and recommendations, the program is continually undergoing changes to ensure that it is best positioned to support Victorian energy consumers. This Bill progresses time-critical changes to the VEET Act to ensure the continued effectiveness of the program while the review is underway.

This Bill will extend the VEU program's legislated end date from 2030 until 2045, to align with our State's net zero emissions target, ensure continued support for more Victorian energy consumers to make the switch to electricity and provide continued certainty for businesses to invest in the program. Making the switch to electric appliances helps our homes and businesses to shift away from the more expensive to run gas appliances and is a significant factor in reducing Victoria's emissions.

Work is currently underway in Victoria on several regulatory measures which could drive the replacement of more than 1.4 million gas appliances by 2030. This could include new minimum energy efficiency standards for rented homes and requirements for new residential buildings to be all-electric, in addition to commercial buildings.

Reducing the upfront costs for energy consumers throughout this transition is vital. Therefore, the Bill will amend the Act to clarify the 'additionality requirement' and explicitly allow for activities that may be mandated by another law or regulation to be prescribed under the VEU program in future. This will allow consumers to continue receiving discounts for energy upgrades in their homes and businesses, and facilitate the uptake of mandated activities when deemed necessary. This will facilitate a smooth transition under any

new regulatory requirements and in turn allow the program to remain fit for purpose in the future of electrification.

Without changes to the existing addtionality requirements, VEU may not be able to support potential new building minimum standards in the future, which will provide broader whole of system benefits to all Victorians – for example by taking pressure off limited gas supplies for gas-dependent customers.

In the absence of a VEU financial discount to reduce the capital costs for replacing gas appliances and undertaking efficiency upgrades, some households and businesses, especially those with low incomes, are likely to either delay replacement, or purchase cheaper but less efficient electric appliances. This may lock households and businesses into higher energy bills, delay the transition from gas to electricity, and put upward pressure on energy prices.

By amending the addtionality requirements, the long-term energy savings under VEU will result in greater emissions reductions, in addition to reductions in ongoing energy demand, therefore reducing the need to build new energy infrastructure in Victoria, contributing to lower wholesale electricity costs. Avoiding a need to build new infrastructure will prevent these associated costs from being passed through to Victorian energy consumers.

The Bill also enables the program's targets for the years 2026 and 2027 to be set in regulations, rather than in a five-year tranche, to allow targets beyond this to incorporate the findings of the strategic review. This will ensure that the program's annual targets best reflect the current market conditions, while supporting energy consumers and climate change mitigation goals.

Consumer protection, safety and integrity are essential to ensure public trust in the program and that its benefits continue to be realised. The Bill will introduce new provisions to modernise and expand the program regulator's compliance and enforcement powers to be consistent with other regulatory schemes. This includes enabling the regulator, the Essential Services Commission, to mandate training requirements for installers and issue improvement and prohibition notices to non-compliant scheme participants. Improvement and prohibition notices will strengthen the enforcement mechanisms available to the Commission.

Currently the Commission's powers are principally focused on accredited persons, with limited powers to take action against scheme participants who may perform activities on behalf of accredited persons. The Bill will also introduce new civil penalty requirements which will provide the Commission with discretion in how best to enforce compliance. These reforms are necessary to ensure that the Commission can more effectively administer the scheme, minimise non-compliance and pursue effective enforcement.

The Bill will also make it easier for obligated parties – electricity and gas retailers – to comply with their obligations to buy and surrender certificates by making the scheme more flexible – removing technical restrictions on the creation and surrender of certificates to enable energy retailers to meet obligations under the VEU program and ensure the program's yearly targets are met.

Finally, the Bill provides the ability to allow for future VEU program discounts to be created specifically for vulnerable and low-income consumers. This will enable greater access to participate in the VEU program in future, especially as cost-of-living pressures continue.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:08): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 3 April.

Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:09): I rise to speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. It is important to start on this bill with what the government intends to do by introducing this great big new tax, because that is what this is. This bill is about introducing a great big new tax that is going to further hit everyone – home owners, landowners, property owners – to the tune of \$2 billion over the next three years. But that is what this

bill is about – imposing a great big new tax on Victorians and in doing so introducing a tax that funds, by part, government service that has always been funded through consolidated revenue. We know that when it comes to new taxes that go to consolidated revenue, this government has repeatedly introduced new taxes under the guise of doing something to support well-meaning causes. However, in practice we know what this government does is impose great big new taxes, and that is what this bill will do.

It is not just my contention that this is a great big new tax; the Treasurer herself confirmed it yesterday. It is important to start with that point. The Treasurer has now confirmed what we thought and knew about this great big new tax. The Treasurer yesterday was confronted with serious concerns from home and property owners and investors that this great big new tax will impose unreasonable additional burdens on them – in fact not just burdens, burdens to the point, as I said yesterday, that hit the final nail in the coffin for investors in this state. What was the Treasurer's response? 'Well, they can afford to pay.' That is what this government and the Treasurer said yesterday. Her view and this government's view is that taxes are too low and certain people who invest to provide homes to Victorians can afford to pay more – and a lot more, we know, in this bill. Both I and the Leader of the Nationals have repeatedly called out not only the burden but what we have now been proven to be right about, and that is that this government has an attack planned to increase taxes through this great big new tax.

I think it is important to put on the record that when we talk about investors, 403,000 of the 560,000 property investors own one property. Though the Treasurer would like to paint these people as some kind of land barons who are not paying enough tax, the house should remember that 64,000 of those property owners are teachers who are saving every dollar to buy that second property, that investment property, for their future. Perhaps it is for the future of their kids – to provide their kids somewhere to live – or an investment to get ahead. This Treasurer is saying to 64,000 teachers, 'You don't pay enough on your salary, and we think you should pay more tax.' What a disgrace. 55,000 are nurses, who this government is saying are land barons and who this Treasurer wants to pay more tax. 41,000 are office administrative assistants – 41,000 land barons as per this Treasurer – who this Treasurer thinks need to pay more tax. Forty thousand are administrative assistants, who the government describes as not paying enough tax – they are land barons as far as the Treasurer is concerned. 21,000 are electricians and 15,000, almost 16,000, are truck drivers – land barons as far as this Labor government is concerned – who deserve a great big new tax. Hundreds of thousands of these 400,000 people who own one property are teachers, nurses, office administrative assistants, admin assistants, electricians and truck drivers who are putting aside every dollar – not only for themselves, but I am sure for their kids – to buy that one investment property for their future to get ahead and for their kids' future to get ahead. This Treasurer's first response yesterday, when asked about this great big new tax, was, 'They can afford to pay.' As I said at the time –

Michael O'Brien interjected.

James NEWBURY: That is right, it is absolutely outrageous that this government would think those hundreds of thousands of hard workers are not doing enough with the taxes they already pay. Frankly this government's plan is to screw them harder. That is what this government is planning to do, and it needs to be called out. As I said yesterday –

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I think we heard some unparliamentary language there.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I did raise an eyebrow at the member. I think he understands where he overstepped.

James NEWBURY: The government wants to push the tax burden on them harder. The government wants them to pay more tax because they are not paying enough, as this government believes. Any of these descriptions I am sure the member can interject on at any point – hundreds of thousands of workers. As I said yesterday, the Premier needs to take a big deep breath and consider

whether this Treasurer is fit for her job, because when we have a great big new tax of \$2 billion over the next three years imposed on some of the hardest working people of the community, the Treasurer's first response, which frankly has shocked people, was these hardworking people – teachers and nurses – are not working hard enough, so they can afford to pay more. That is what this Treasurer has said: these people do not work hard enough and are not paying enough tax, so they should be paying more. What a disgrace. Not a single member from the other side of the chamber – no-one from the executive or the Premier – has come out to say they support these hardworking people and the Treasurer was out of line. Every member who speaks on this bill has an opportunity to correct the record and say whether or not nurses and teachers are working hard enough, as far as the Treasurer is concerned, and should be paying more tax.

That is what this bill is about. It is about imposing a great big new tax. What the government will say is this great big new tax is going to fund emergency services management and support. What they will not tell you is that this great big new tax is also going to fund core government services, the operation of government, not, as they would lead you to believe, just emergency services organisations. It is going to fund department work and agency work of government. That is why this tax needs to be called out. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government commits to consulting with stakeholders on the rebate scheme and which organisations should receive funding.'

What we know is the government supposedly is introducing a great big new tax to fund emergency services. When you look at the list of what is allowed to be funded under this great big new tax, it is a broad range: meritorious of course, the Country Fire Authority; meritorious of course, Fire Rescue Victoria and also the Victorian State Emergency Service. But as I raised as a concern before, we have core government work, core government services: Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety for funding of emergency management, whatever that may include – the secretary of the department, for emergency services work. The coalition has moved an amendment, because we are concerned – and I can put on the record that not only are we moving this amendment in this place but we will also be moving textual amendments in the other place that go into these issues in more detail in terms of the organisations. But the point is that this great big new tax is not only funding people who need it but also funding core government work, and we say this great big new tax is actually about collecting more money through more tax to do work of government in addition to supporting organisations that do incredibly hard work.

Not only has the government created a list of organisations that we have questioned in terms of the current list, and that goes straight to the amendment, but a number of members have gone to the government about organisations that have not been included in funding. A number of members have advocated strongly to ensure that other organisations are considered who have not been. For example, the member for South-West Coast has advocated strongly in relation to marine rescue Victoria, the coastguard, Life Saving Victoria and St John Ambulance, which the government has confirmed are not going to be funded through any funds raised in this bill. So we would say the government are prioritising core government work but by their own admission have neglected to address any of the funding issues raised by these very meritorious organisations who do incredible work, organisations that the member for South-West Coast has argued and advocated for very, very strongly in the lead-up to this bill, as have, I know, a number of other members who I am sure will refer to the work of emergency services organisations in their communities which the government have said will not be considered as part of this bill.

I want to also touch on, while I am speaking about the amendment, the other matter that has been raised in the amendment, the rebate scheme. The government committed last year, when they announced their great big new tax, to providing volunteers with an exemption, effectively, from the tax for the hard work that they do. When the announcement first came out, that made sense because

they do incredible work and they do it as volunteers. Seeing the hard work of the volunteers recognised was fair, reasonable and important. But what we have learned since that announcement, as is always the case with this government, is the government have found a way to claw back that money they have not even given out yet – claw it back from emergency services volunteers – and the Treasurer has more recently announced that the exemption will now come in the form of a rebate. What the Treasurer admitted yesterday – on what I think we can all fairly say was a very bad day for the Treasurer, after admitting that people do not pay enough tax – was that hardworking volunteers are now going to have to pay the tax. They are going to have to pay the tax up-front. They are going to have to pay. I hear members on the other side are surprised. Well, do not be surprised. You are about to vote for this bill, members.

This bill will require in its operation hardworking volunteers to pay the tax up-front – shameful. Then these poor volunteers are going to have to figure out, one, if they are eligible for a rebate – and I think we can all safely assume this government is not starting an advertising campaign on how these volunteers can seek a rebate. I think we are going to find out on page 124 of a *Government Gazette* on Christmas Day and that is going to be the end of that. This government is going to force volunteers to pay the tax up-front and then somehow seek a rebate. How will they do that? It appears the government does not even know the full details yet.

They will go to an appointed government agency, which I think we can all safely assume will be the State Revenue Office. I think it is probably fair to say it is not the friendliest of front-facing organisations of the government, the State Revenue Office. I am sure that a lot of people who have had experience trying to seek a rebate from the State Revenue Office have got an answering machine message that says 'No' before you find a person. Whatever you are ringing about, the answer is no. And then you finally get through to a person who then tells you 'No' in person. You will go to the State Revenue Office presumably or somewhere on a website – I imagine 44 clicks in on a website – to find a form, and then you will fill out a form. You might be asking, 'Who fills out the form? Who will fill out the form? Who's eligible for it?' Well, the government does not know. I asked the government, 'Who's included? Which volunteers are the government exempting?' And they did not know who they were exempting. I gave the example of John, who has been a volunteer for 38 years. He is now 82, so he is not volunteering in the same way that he has been previously, but he has given 38 years. Will he still seek an exemption? The government would not guarantee that poor John, who has given 38 years of volunteer work to our community, would still be eligible for this exemption. I do not know why we are calling it an exemption; it is a rebate – if you can find it.

The coalition has moved an amendment which goes to those two matters. It goes to the funding issue and how this great big new tax will operate, and it also goes to the rebate. On the funding issue, we not only have concerns about how the operation or how the split of the money works, if I can put it as crassly as that: what is going to core government business? What is going to department work? How many more public servants are being funded with this? Will more public servants be funded? The government has not answered that question; the government has not said whether or not this will fund more general public service work. But we also have concerns around transparency, how these funds are allocated annually and what that will look like. So the coalition in the other place, when we have an opportunity to provide more detail, will be raising further concerns about ensuring that the funding is transparently reported. We talk about that a lot in this chamber as bills come through; very commonly in fact we have moved amendments which simply say, 'Please annually report.' That seems like a fair and reasonable thing. So when it comes to this bill in the other place, where we have that more detailed opportunity, we will talk about not only how the funding is split but also how it is reported. We believe that there should be annual reporting. We believe that there should be transparency when you are adding a \$2 billion increased cost through a great big new tax on Victorians. It is not unreasonable to be transparent about it, and I would say if you are doing the right thing with the money, why would you hide reporting what you are using it for? That is a fair point, I would have thought. If you are doing the right thing with the tax you are collecting, why would you hide what you are doing with it?

When it comes to the bill, I have raised a number of concerns on behalf of the coalition, which is why we will not support it – this great big new tax. Of course we will not. What this government is doing is saying, ‘We are collecting a great big new tax. We’re going to push part of the money that it raises into core government work – government work that was previously funded through consolidated revenue – and we are doing it through a great big new tax that we won’t even transparently report on.’ It is doing it in a really sneaky way. Earlier I referred to the Treasurer’s comments about how hundreds of thousands of property investors – as I mentioned, teachers, nurses, office administrative assistants, electricians, truck drivers – are not paying enough tax as far as the Treasurer is concerned and the particular measure that changes how an investor pays tax through this bill and substantially increases their tax burden. What we know for certain that will do is push property investors out of Victoria, and we are already seeing it. We are seeing a fleeing of property investors –

Danny O’Brien interjected.

James NEWBURY: Well, we know that last year the property price in Victoria went down, and there have been a number of members on the other side of the chamber who have privately said that they think that it is a good thing that people’s property values go down. That is what they have said. I see the Premier coming into the chamber, and it will be interesting to see whether the Premier chastises her Treasurer. While the Premier is here, let me say to the Premier –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

James NEWBURY: Through the Chair, the Treasurer yesterday said that property investors are not paying enough tax, effectively, and can afford to pay more. I see the Premier in the chamber, but I have not heard the Premier chastise her Treasurer yet, because nurses, teachers, hardworking office administrative assistants, farmers and electricians are not paying enough tax, says the Premier’s Treasurer. Instead let the record show the Premier has not taken the opportunity to respond in the chamber and call out the Treasurer’s just appalling remarks, which in my view should make the Premier question whether the Treasurer is fit for the role – and walked out of the chamber. If you are one of the hundreds of thousands of nurses or if you are one of the hundreds of thousands of teachers, office administrative assistants, admin assistants, electricians, truck drivers, just to name some of the hundreds of thousands of people that own that investment property, the Premier walked into the chamber, had an opportunity to call it out and say you all work hard but did not. She turned her back on you and walked out.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

James NEWBURY: Deputy Speaker, I am observing the fact that the Premier walked into the chamber, and I can understand why members on the other side of the chamber are upset that they have been called out on it. All of those hardworking people deserve to have someone who stands up for them, and the coalition will. And what is the government doing? They are now laughing about imposing a great big new tax on these hardworking people and saying that they deserve to pay more tax. Well, the thing that Victorians have worked out is this government is imposing great big new taxes on everyone. That is what Victorians have worked out, just like they have worked out the streets are less safe and the government is not going to fix it. Press conferences do not fix crime, press conferences do not fix higher taxes, and that is what Victorians have worked out.

With this bill the coalition cannot support this government’s great big new tax, this \$2 billion new tax that hits people hard. That is what it does; it hits people hard. When the government says, ‘We’re going to raise \$2 billion,’ and then in a press release says, ‘We’re going to give out \$200 million; aren’t we good?’ just remember the quantum difference between what they have committed to and what they are raising. They raise \$2 billion and then in a press release say, ‘Aren’t we good that we’re going to give out \$200 million?’ All we are saying –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: I am being told by the other side of this chamber it is a little more than \$200 million out of the \$2 billion. Well, is it? I am just going to leave it there.

The coalition has moved an amendment to the bill because there are core issues with this bill that need to be addressed. Those issues will also be prosecuted in the upper house when it comes to the distribution of funding and when it comes to the transparency around how funding is reported. I would hope the upper house looks at that transparency measure but also the rebate scheme, which is a really, really nasty scheme to make volunteers pay and then try to claw them back. We have moved that amendment, we will oppose this great big new tax and we will call it out for what it is. The Treasurer's comments yesterday should stand condemned, and frankly she should apologise.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:39): I was just taking some notes, and there is so much to say, so little time. What I got from that 20-minute speech was that the opposition are opposing a \$250 million investment in volunteer emergency services, blocking new trucks, new thermal imaging cameras, new rescues, new boats – that is all I got from that – at a time when we are seeing increasing natural disasters that are touching every community in Victoria, even Brighton. We are seeing increased flood and storm events and we are seeing lasting devastation wrought on us by them. I say that because between 2009 and 2013, for example, the Victorian State Emergency Service averaged roughly 20,000 call-outs a year. Twenty thousand is still a huge number, but over the last three years the VICSES have averaged over 35,000 calls a year. The Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund makes sure all our emergency services have the tools and resources they need to keep Victorians safe and brings funding for emergency services in line with other states, as it should be, as is appropriate. It is in response to a campaign by VICSES that was basically calling for a fairer funding model that gave certainty for the future as well as being fair and equitable across fire services and the SES.

With that can I give a big shout-out to our VICSES members. It is the 50th anniversary this year. I know my local team in Frankston and surrounds are just amazing. Seeing what they do now is incredible. Working beside them as a firefighter for years, I was always astounded at their skills and how they use them. Can I shout out to someone who is in the gallery today, Mike Bagnall. He advocated for this fairer funding model as well, so congratulations. It must be really hard for some of our volunteers to hear the rubbish that just came out of the mouth of the member for Brighton and from those who will come forward in the opposition talking about this. My first question to them is: how many volunteers did you speak to about this bill? I heard zero from the member for Brighton. He did not consult with a single volunteer as far as we are concerned. I spent the last couple of months speaking to volunteers, and I tell you what, they back this in. They wanted this.

I want to spend some of my time dispelling some of the myths, some of the mistruths, that have been perpetuated in the last 20 minutes. We heard from the member for Brighton that this will be a tax that will go into government consolidated revenue. That is an absolute fallacy. This will be paid into a consolidated fund just like the fire services property levy was. Now, if you do not know the history of the fire services property levy, I will go through it just so some of the newer backbenchers on the opposition benches can actually question their shadow ministers. That fire services property levy was brought in, I think, in September 2013. It was in response to a recommendation from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. This fund is structured appropriately like that one; there is basically no difference. It goes into a consolidated fund, and it is used for our volunteers.

The opposition shadow spokesman also talked about why some other agencies are involved in this. Again, it is very appropriate that agencies like Emergency Recovery Victoria and the State Control Centre are involved in this, but the control department over them is the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Those agencies have a huge amount to do with our communities when the emergency is over and we go through that huge recovery phase, which is becoming more and more a point that we focus on, as it should be, because in years gone past – 20 years ago – we just did not. We came in, we put out the fire, we cut the trees down, we cleared up from the flood or the storm and communities were left to do as communities do. There was not much support. These days we have a system where communities are helped. They lead their recovery, but they are assisted by

us. From memory – Mike might be able to help out here – it is Emergency Management Act 2013 section 7, from my old leading firefighter days. It is absolutely appropriate that those services are in this bill.

It is fine that members on the other side speak about volunteers a lot. I would like to just point out the Leader of the Nationals as an exception here, and there are some exceptions here. When some of those opposite talk about volunteers, it is almost like they are on another planet, because I do not think they talk to them enough. I was just talking to my good friend John here, the member for Werribee. He is a bit bleary-eyed this morning because he turned out at 10 o'clock last night to go and put out some fool's fire – a farmer lit a fire or something like that. Our volunteers turn out rain, hail, shine, 24/7, and they deserve support from this government. That is what we are doing with this.

I find it absolutely hilarious that we can have the shadow minister stand up and say, 'The coalition will stand up for you. The coalition will have your back.' Well, I have got a bit of a personal story about that, because the coalition did not have my back when I was in the Morwell mine fire for about a month and almost killed. They would not push the button and make this a statewide emergency, which it was. We had a whole town pretty much evacuated, people dying from carbon monoxide poisoning and firefighters down in that mine. To give you a bit of a picture, the circumference of that mine is 42 kilometres. It is a huge area to put out. It was like dealing with one bite of the elephant at a time. Every day we went down there, just covered in ash, and waited for someone to push the button and say, 'This is a statewide emergency. It will now become a level 3 emergency, and we will be able to have more resources there to put this thing out.' As it happened, the Napthine government were coming up to an election. They certainly did not want to admit that they had a problem coming up to an election. So for people like me, and the volunteers around me, that affected us. We have still got people that are affected to this day because of what happened down there – people with health issues and people that will never volunteer again.

The opposition can say all they want that they have people's backs. But actions count; words do not. It is the actions in this bill that are making change for our volunteers, and it is what our volunteers want. I had a consultation session recently with Mount Eliza fire brigade – a big shout-out to the member for Mornington, who has got a great brigade there, and the member for Hastings – and the Baxter brigade was there on the weekend. They are a great bunch of people with a great culture, and they are out the door within a second when they need to go and help their communities. The very least we can do as government is make sure that we are funding them properly.

This amendment to the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 replaces the existing levy and will be used to fund 95 per cent of the CFA's annual budget – that is an increase from the 77.5 per cent with the actual levy – and 87.5 per cent of FRV's annual budget, which is really no change. It will also fund up to 95 per cent of the Victorian State Emergency Service's budget; the Emergency Management Victoria budget, including our recovery agencies; and the Forest Fire Management Victoria budget.

I have also heard from those opposite about the levy and how it is collected and the exemptions for volunteers. It is our intention that volunteers will not need to pay the full levy before receiving a rebate. An application will be processed in a fast and efficient manner to assist volunteers to get their rebate back as quickly as possible – as they should.

We can stand here today and we can debate this. We have already heard from the opposition that they are standing in the way of a \$250 million package for new trucks, new equipment and new resources. \$70 million of that is included over the next four years for fleet replacement programs with VICSES and CFA. We are doubling the volunteer emergency services equipment program to \$62 million and delivering extra training for SES volunteers at a rate of more than \$30 million to get them the skills and the support they need.

What we are hearing though from those opposite is that they do not want this. They are going to stand in the way of our volunteers. They are going to stand in the way of the people that absolutely keep our

community safe. We will not hear this argument come next summer or winter when there are floods. We will have everyone in this chamber standing up and saying, ‘Our volunteers are so great. I went and visited them. I gave them a donut. I gave them a “Well done, mate. Love your work.”’ They were not getting up at midnight. They were not up to their knees in floodwaters. This is the least that people in this chamber can do. You should be supporting this. I commend the bill to the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members to not acknowledge or refer to members of the gallery and also to be careful not to cross the stream between the speaker on his feet and the Chair.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:49): I will not say I am pleased to rise to speak on this legislation, because what this legislation is is a great big new tax of cost shifting – of double taxation by a Labor government that cannot manage money and is now expecting all Victorians to pay. I want to take up some of the very predictable points made by the member for Frankston and make some things clear. This is not about new support for our volunteer emergency services sector. These sectors, the CFA and the SES, have long been supported by this chamber, and certainly by those of us on this side of the house. Most particularly, when it comes to the CFA it was the Liberals and Nationals in government, as the member for Frankston pointed out, who actually set up the fire services property levy, after a recommendation from the bushfires royal commission, to ensure that those services were properly funded. The previous system, whereby the levies were on insurance, meant that people who did not pay for insurance did not contribute, people who were underinsured did not contribute enough and too many people were facing the burden. It is a complete misnomer for those opposite to try and say that somehow this is about us not supporting volunteers. What this government is doing is simply changing how it collects the levy and who is a recipient of it.

We on this side do not oppose the SES being part of the new levy. We have no issue with that whatsoever. What we do have a big issue with is the list of organisations that the government is now adding, including Emergency Management Victoria, Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Recovery Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria and the State Control Centre, all of which are things that are core government services and have been forever and a day. They are core government services funded from consolidated revenue. Now they are going to be funded through this new big tax – a massive increase, a \$2.1 billion increase, in tax collection on Victorians over the next three years.

What does that look like individually? If you look at the rates that the government has published, the residential rate will double from 8.7 cents per \$1000 capital improved value to 17.3 cents, the commercial rate will double, the industrial rate will go up by 64 per cent and the primary production rate will go up by 189 per cent. You will be having a whole lot of farmers paying massive increases in the fire levy, many of whom are actually the people that go out and fight the fires in the first place and many of them are doing it in 35-year-old trucks with very little support from this government over the past 10 years. Some are non-CFA, and many of them are doing it with their own private gear as well. The notion that now they are going to get a bit of an exemption, an exemption that the government still cannot tell us how it is going to operate, is absurd.

I want to come back to that taxation issue. All of those new recipients of this new tax that are currently government-funded agencies through consolidated revenue – what is the cost of those, I wonder? We actually asked, through the briefing, the government to provide us with a list from 2025–26 of how much each of the new funding recipients – including the existing ones, FRV and CFA – are going to get out of the \$1.649 billion that this tax is anticipated to raise this year. The government have not told us; they have not given us an answer to that. In fact the answer that we got was just a list of all the agencies. Well, that is not the question we asked. You can make some calculations, though. The new increase is going to raise – this is from the budget update – an additional \$610 million. If we say that we are adding in the SES and if we look at the most recent SES annual report, they received about \$115 million in grants. In rough numbers, those government agencies are going to be costing this levy \$500 million, half a billion dollars, a year. That is money that came out of consolidated revenue previously. As the member for Gippsland East has interjected a number of times, where is the

corresponding offset in consolidated revenue, a reduction in taxes that Victorians will have to pay because this is now being funded out of this levy?

Tim Bull interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is right, member for Gippsland East, it is not there. What this bill is all about is nothing to do with supporting volunteers; nothing to do with supporting emergency services, volunteer or otherwise; and nothing to do with ‘Oh, we’re getting more and more emergency activity in bushfires and floods and everything.’ It is all about the fact that this Labor government cannot manage money and is desperately looking for a cost saving somewhere. What it has done with this is it has taken these consolidated revenue funded agencies, many of them just public servants, not even frontline workers, and it is putting on top of them, through this new bill, a new big tax that Victorians will have to pay – Victorians, I might say, like those at Traynors Lagoon, mentioned in the *Weekly Times* yesterday. There are 14 farming families that make up the brigade at Traynors Lagoon. Their levy for firefighting is going to go up from \$73,000 – across the members of the brigade, this year they are currently paying \$73,000. Next year under this levy it will be \$212,000, a tripling of that levy. These are farmers. These are not people that are very, very wealthy. They are wealthy in terms of assets, and that is why they are copping such a big whack, because this levy is on assets. I think it was the member for Lowan who suggested that this is a de facto land tax on farms in particular. It is not just the farmers. The people of Traynors Lagoon are one of thousands of communities across the state, across hundreds of CFA brigades, that are going to have to pay this massive increase, even with the exemptions they will get, which will not make a huge difference to what they will ultimately pay.

More particularly, we are in a cost-of-living crisis. We are in a housing and rental affordability crisis. There is another little sneaky thing the government has put in. It still has not updated the figures on its website. Since the bill was presented we now know that not only will owners of non-principal private residences – in other words, people who have got a property for investment or a holiday home or whatever – now pay double the variable rate but the fixed charge is also doubling. It will be going up from \$132 to \$276 next year. If the government had any economic literacy whatsoever, it would understand that if you put a new big tax – both of these taxes, both the fixed and the variable charges, are doubling – on landlords, or rental providers, if you prefer, what are they going to do? They are going to have to pass that on to renters. This could actually be labelled a renters affordability tax. That is exactly what it is, because in addition to all the other taxes that this government has already placed on property, including the increases in land taxes, it is going to have an impact. It is going to have an impact on the commercial and the industrial sector and, as I said, particularly the farmland. This will have a massive impact.

On the question of the exemptions, the government and the member for Frankston said it is not the government’s intention to have people pay up-front and then have to claim a rebate. I would ask the government perhaps to look up what the definition of ‘rebate’ is. More particularly, how is it going to operate? Those of us who were at the bill briefing with the government got a lecture at the start that ‘This starts on 1 July, and so you’re going to have to support this to get it through. Time is of the essence. We need to rush.’ When we asked questions like ‘Okay, so how does the exemption operate?’ the government could not tell us. They cannot tell us how it is going to operate. ‘No, you won’t have to pay up-front and then get a rebate’ – well, how does it work?

BrIDGET VALLENCE interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is starting, as the member for Evelyn is saying, in a couple of months time, and the government cannot tell us how it is going to work. Indeed, who is eligible for the exemption? The government has outsourced it to the CFA and SES and said, ‘You guys work that out.’ We are in a world of pain. That is without touching on the impacts on local government, who have been collecting this under the fire services property levy for a long time. They are now going to be facing very angry punters who are going to see massive increases in the bill that comes with their rates. This is a government that cannot manage money and cannot manage our emergency services, so it is going

back to Victorians and gouging more funds out of them – \$610 million next year, \$2.1 billion over the forward estimates – with a massive big new tax that does not help our volunteers and will hurt all Victorians.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:59): As you would imagine, I stand in support of this fund and of this bill, because we need to do all we can to support our emergency services, because they really matter. They are incredibly important to a state like Victoria. I want to thank the member for Frankston for not just his outstanding contribution to this debate and his absolute support for our emergency services but also his incredible contribution as a past firefighter. I think he exemplifies that our emergency services do what they do because they care about people and community, of which we see constant examples from the member for Frankston. Our emergency services deserve our support, they deserve our gratitude and they deserve our respect, and this ensures that they have what they need when they need it.

The cynical manner in which the opposition are approaching this fund is really disappointing. To offer a different perspective to the member for Brighton, whose own community will have to continue to manage rising sea levels due to climate change, property owners deserve to have their properties protected as well as possible. We need to do this as a consequence of the increasing frequency with which we are seeing challenging weather conditions and the natural disasters we are seeing each year. This is why we need to increase our investment in emergency services. Climate change is real, and we are living the consequences. Living in the gentle enclave of Brighton, the member may think his community does not need to contribute to support our emergency services, but we all have a role to play in supporting our emergency services – every single Victorian. Rather than using them for political fodder, they deserve our respect and support. I also ask the opposition, in their refusal to support this legislation, why they want to block a \$250 million investment in our emergency services. Which property do they not want to see defended? Which emergency organisations do they not want to see an increase in appliances, training or equipment for?

This is a significant reform that strengthens the way we fund and support this state's emergency services. We are amending the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 and replacing it with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund to ensure that a broader range of emergency services are funded in a way that reflects their increasing workload. The demand on our emergency services is growing. It is growing each and every year, and to pretend that it is not, to pretend that every Victorian does not have a role to play in supporting our emergency services, is not only short-sighted, it is delusional. We are also introducing an exemption for eligible CFA and VICSES volunteers and enabling the release of the \$250 million support package.

I do want to recognise that this year we are in the 50th year of the SES, which is half a century of absolutely extraordinary service by thousands upon thousands of dedicated volunteers. I had the pleasure of joining some of our longest serving VICSES members, including Dennis Brain and Peter Weeks, to launch the celebrations of the 50th anniversary recently. It was amazing to see how far they have come in 50 years from the equipment they had in the 1970s to what they have got now and what we will need to continue to invest in. It was an absolute privilege to acknowledge their incredible contributions and to reflect on the vital role VICSES has played in keeping Victorians safe for five decades.

In recent weeks I have also visited a number of SES units, including Bannockburn, Moorabbin and Whitehorse. It has been fantastic to meet with these volunteers and to personally thank them for the work – the volunteer work – that they do. Our SES units and our volunteers are absolutely incredible. Without fuss they turn up to so many diverse events. I do not think there is an emergency service that has the diversity that the SES experience – events that for so many people can be the worst day of their lives. And they have these incredibly kind, incredibly generous people turn up as quickly as possible to help, support and protect them.

This bill is about listening to the voices of our emergency services, especially our volunteers. My community is well supported by our VICSES Nillumbik and the unit controller Justin Kibell. Justin told me about the new fund. He said:

This is a step in the right direction towards sustainable funding for VICSES. Units rely on volunteers to turn out, to train, and to fundraise – this levy should lessen that need, assist with critical asset programs, and give our members more time to train, and more time with their families. With several of our busiest years on record and seemingly more frequent severe weather events, increasing support to VICSES is essential.

This reform also owes a great deal to the dedicated volunteer advocates like Mike Bagnall, the Footscray SES unit controller, and Goldie Pergl from the Fawkner SES unit, who have been passionate voices for change. Just this week when I met with Mike and Goldie I heard from both Mike and his local member, the Minister for Health, Minister Thomas, about Mike's advocacy to her over the need for these reforms. Volunteers like Mike and Goldie continue to push to ensure Victoria's emergency services are properly funded, are better equipped and are prepared for the challenges ahead. I thank them for all they have done to support their communities, the SES and other emergency services.

Of course the CFA are also included in this legislation. Since I have had the absolute privilege of being the Minister for Emergency Services, I have visited CFA brigades, including Keysborough, Pakenham and Nar Nar Goon. These visits have absolutely been invaluable, not just to hear directly from volunteers about what they need and to have that conversation but also for the opportunity to be able to reiterate the thanks of me as minister, the government, as well as Victorians for the work that they do. Our CFA volunteers continue to be an integral part of the front line of Victoria's emergency response; they step up time and time again to protect their communities. We show our gratitude through being supportive of the work that they do, and that includes the work of this fund.

As I have said, we are asking more and more than ever from our emergency services. Already in this fire season alone there have been more than 4000 fires across Victoria. We saw a huge campaign fire in the Grampians, a fire that went for three months, involving thousands of those from emergency services, including CFA volunteers from western Victoria and across our state. Over Christmas, the new year and summer they gave up their time to battle these blazes. Just on the past weekend CFA volunteers volunteered to be deployed to Mount Gambier to support South Australia's firefighting efforts. In Melbourne on the weekend we saw the Montrose fire, which required a multi-agency response, with over 100 firefighters, 40 vehicles, four helicopters and three bulldozers, in a coordinated effort from CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria, FRV and Victoria Police. When the initial call came in at 1:43 pm on Saturday afternoon, CFA crews were on the scene within 8 minutes. Later that night, as conditions worsened, the CFA rapidly scaled up their response, with 30 appliances arriving quickly. This is the kind of dedication and professionalism our emergency services bring to every incident, and it underscores why this bill is so important – to support them with the resources they need, to recognise the increase in demand that they are experiencing and to respond appropriately.

We are one of the most fire-prone regions in the world, and the effects of climate change and population growth mean we are seeing increased frequency and severity of bushfires, floods and storms that devastate communities. Storms or floods that were once in a lifetime or once in a hundred years are becoming part of everyday life, placing greater pressure on the CFA, VICSES and other emergency services to respond, recover and protect lives. We have never argued against the science of climate change on this side of the house. We have never denied the science that said that changes to our climate would result in greater and increased frequency of natural disasters and severe weather events. The Commonwealth's Australian Climate Service has said that the *State of the Climate 2024* report from the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO shows in the coming decades Australia will experience ongoing changes to its weather and climate. Australia is projected to experience continued increase in air temperatures, more heat extremes and fewer cold extremes; continued decrease, on average, in cool season rainfall across many regions of southern and eastern Australia – where we live – which will likely lead to more time in drought, but with ongoing climate variability that will give rise to short-duration heavy rainfall events at a range of timescales; continued increase in the

number of dangerous fire weather days and longer fire seasons for southern and eastern Victoria; and further sea level rise and continued warming and acidification of the oceans around Australia.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (11:09): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. I do so not because it is in my portfolio but because I had a fair bit to do, in a previous role in this Parliament, with the institution of the fire services property levy in the first place. I do think it is useful when considering what the government wants to do now to remind ourselves of a little bit of history.

It used to be that our fire services – the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, as it then was, and the CFA – were largely funded through a duty on insurance policies that applied to certain real property insurance policies. It was quite a historical anomaly. You would think that most emergency services would be directly budget funded, but for some reason over many, many decades in Victoria we had funded our fire services largely through this stamp duty that applied on insurance policies. At its heart, this was very unfair, because people who chose not to insure their properties received the full benefit of the MFB and the CFA if they had a need but they did not make any contribution to it. People who underinsured likewise received a disproportionate benefit compared to their contribution. People who may have overinsured were paying too much. At its heart it was an unfair system because everybody benefited but not everybody contributed. This had been identified as an obvious target for tax reform over many years, but no governments had the courage to take it on until the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission report came down in 2010.

It recommended that our fire brigades be funded, not from a levy or stamp duty on insurance but from a broad-based levy that applied to property. My predecessor as state Treasurer Kim Wells and then I were intimately involved in putting together that tax reform. It was a form of tax reform. It was probably the most significant tax reform that this state had seen in many, many years, because it was something that touched every single one of us. It was very important that we got it right, because funding our fire services is critically important to all of our safety. But it was also important to get it right so it would not be an unfair burden. I spent many, many waking hours working on the fire services property levy bills to try and make sure that we did get it right. I was disappointed that the opposition at the time, the Labor Party, did not support the fire services property levy, notwithstanding the fact that it was a direct recommendation of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. It is quite clear that this was a change that needed to occur.

I call it tax reform not just because we moved from a levy based on certain insurance policies to a broad-based property levy but also because previously if you were a concession card holder or a pensioner you received no discount. When that levy was applied to your insurance premium you received no discount even if you were a pensioner or even if you were a concession card holder. What we were able to do through implementing a fire services property levy was to provide for the first time a discount for pensioners and a discount for concession card holders. So it was not just fair in terms of spreading the cost of funding our fire services more equally, but it was fair by giving a cut – a concession, a discount – to pensioners and concession card holders, and that was very, very important.

It was also important because while the government of which I was a part increased funding to our fire services each and every single year, when we implemented the fire services property levy we actually cut the impost on Victorians by \$100 million. So here was real tax reform – a \$100 million reduction in the tax burden on Victorians, a concession for the first time for pensioners and concession card holders and a fairer system of funding our fire services so every property owner made a fair contribution, not just those who paid insurance premiums. Notwithstanding that the Labor opposition at the time opposed the legislation and opposed the change, I do note that the now Labor government did not seek to scrap it, and for very good reason – because it was a very good tax reform that needs to be done. But now we see this bill before the house, and what the government is trying to do is not to be true to the bushfires royal commission recommendation; the government is simply trying to cost-shift. The government is now using the mechanism of the fire services property levy in order to put more tax burden on Victorian property owners and less burden on its own central budget allocations.

This is a clear case of cost-shifting by the Labor government, putting more burden on taxpayers to try and protect its own budget position. That is why the opposition does not support this bill.

Can I give a shout-out to the great men and women of the Victoria State Emergency Service Malvern unit. They are a fantastic group of people; they are doing an amazing job. I believe that what they do is core government business, and that should be funded as core government business. I do not believe they should be subjected to an extra tax that Victorians have to specifically pay. It is quite politically disingenuous of this government to use the word 'volunteers' in this bill when really they are just using it as an excuse to try and make a big tax increase appear more palatable. We all love our volunteers. We especially love our SES and our CFA – not that we have the CFA in my electorate, but we do have the SES. They do an amazing job, and they deserve to be properly funded; they do not deserve to be used as political cover by a government to justify a massive new tax increase.

When you look at the projected revenue from these levies over the forward estimates, it is quite clear what the scale of this tax increase on Victorian households is going to be. The revenue from these levies is expected to rise from \$1.033 billion this financial year to \$1.649 billion in 2025–26 and then to \$1.8 billion in 2026–27. The budget update in December shows the increase is \$2.1 billion over the next three years. So this is a \$2 billion tax grab by a broke Allan Labor government to hit Victorian households. How much of that extra \$2 billion is actually going to the SES? How much of it is actually going to the volunteers of the CFA? Two-thirds of not much is the answer. This is just a huge tax grab from a government that wants to try and take off its own budget issues and put them onto the backs of Victorian property owners.

That is why I do support the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Brighton. I do believe that the government should commit to consulting with stakeholders on the rebate scheme and which organisations should receive funding. As I say, nobody has any question that our volunteer organisations, especially the SES and the CFA, deserve to be properly funded; they absolutely do. The only question is: should they be funded by a big new tax so the government can shove it off its books and put it on the backs of taxpayers or is it core government business? I happen to think that the great work done by the men and women in orange at the SES should be core government business and it should be funded as such, the way it has been funded for years and years and years. This is simply a tax grab. It is simply a cost-shifting exercise by a Labor government that actually is not putting extra money into volunteers. They are just trying to save their own money and their own political hide.

It is not the first time we have seen the government this week try and put political slogans into the titles of legislation. They tried to do it with the bail bill.

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: I suspect we will be talking about that later today or maybe even tomorrow, member for Eildon, because I think people in the other place have cottoned onto that. I do not think people in the other place like the government with its so-called tough bail laws which are not that tough; in fact the ACCC would have things to say about that. But on this bill we support our CFA volunteers; we support our SES volunteers. We believe what they do is core government business. It should be funded as core government business. The great work they do and the great contributions they make should not be used as an excuse, as political cover, by a government to justify a more than \$2 billion tax grab on the backs of Victorian property owners.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (11:19): I also rise to speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. Can I thank the Treasurer for bringing this legislation to the house, and I also thank the Minister for Emergency Services for her contribution and for visiting me at my local SES, the Whitehorse SES, just a few weeks ago to hear some of the challenges that they are facing, and I will get to those a little bit later. The bill does amend the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 to replace the fire services property levy with the Emergency

Services and Volunteers Fund levy to enable it to fund a broader range of emergency services that we need.

As has been mentioned by a number of speakers, not least the minister at the table, the Minister for Emergency Services, our challenges in this space are getting larger and larger, particularly when it comes to storm events. We see the way that our rainfall patterns are changing. Our average might not change, but for years the Bureau of Meteorology and the climatologists have predicted that we are going to be seeing shorter, sharper storms, which much of our existing infrastructure is not necessarily designed to accommodate, particularly people's own homes. So the call on the SES is going to be continuously greater as the years go on.

The new fund will include additional emergency services and be used to fund up to 95 per cent of the annual budgets for the SES, Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, the State Control Centre and the state's recovery agency.

I was interested listening to the member for Malvern's history of the development of the fire services levy and how that had come from insurance. His statement was that it seemed fair that all users of the fire services should pay a contribution and should pay their fair share and not just rely on those who choose to insure. I think on that policy basis I would say that this is exactly what the government is trying to do here. We know that there is going to be a greater call on the emergency services, particularly the SES, and that is why the fairest way of attributing that cost is that the community in its entirety pay for the cost of fire services and emergency services. They do service anybody who is in need. You do not call them up and say 'I need help from the SES' and they ask 'Have you paid your levy or have you paid your insurance?' They will come, no questions asked, at any time of the day or night, and I do thank them for it.

I also want to just reflect on some of the feedback that we have received from SES members in my community. Many members would have actually received similar correspondence, I believe, around this time last year. I have got an email here from May 2024, which was a long email talking about how important VICSES are and the amount of work that they do. It says:

The reliance on volunteer-led fundraising to procure vital equipment, maintain facilities, and replace end-of-life fleet assets is simply unsustainable.

It mentions that VICSES is not included in the current Victorian fire services levy, despite being the control agency for a significant majority of the costs associated with disasters caused by natural hazards in the state. It then says:

As our elected representative, we urge you to consider the following points:

- The urgent need for indexed, sustainable funding to ensure VICSES can continue to deliver critical emergency services to all Victorians.

It goes on to say:

In light of these pressing issues, we propose expanding the existing Fire Services Levy into an Emergency Services Levy to secure stable funding for VICSES.

This was an email which I am sure was sent to many members. I received similar emails from many members of my local SES calling for this exact change.

When the government announced the change in December I received a further email from our local unit controller, who said:

Last Friday was an exciting day, with the government announcing the new Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund now inclusive of the VICSES. This is a great step forward, as it provides SES with additional, sustained funding which will assist with vehicle fleet management, training programs for volunteers, additional equipment budget et cetera, placing a higher value on the SES and the services delivered to the state and reducing the need for volunteers to fundraise. Great news. Thanks for your support.

I come to this bill particularly in that light, seeing what it will do to our SES to set them up on a sustainable footing and listening to what our local SES members have had to say.

I do want to spend some time just reflecting on the Whitehorse SES and the wonderful job that they do. The Whitehorse SES is an extremely busy SES station. They have mentioned before that they respond to about 4 per cent of the total case incidents across the state. A large part of that is because we are lucky that we still have a fairly dense tree canopy throughout Whitehorse, and they also look after about half of the Boroondara council area. When you have storms and high winds and fairly dense housing, that often results in tree limbs falling and blocking access ways or falling on roofs, which triggers a lot of their call-outs. They also have an urban search and rescue team. Much of their patch covers parts of the Yarra River and also the Koonung Creek, so there is often search and rescue that they need to do in that urban bushland setting. They also punch above their weight. They are always on call to go and help other SES units when needed. I noticed on their website earlier this week that three of the local SES members have answered the call to go and help out in Queensland in the cyclone recovery. All of these members are volunteers. They all have other jobs, and it is a fantastic commitment to service that all of our SES members provide.

I do want to also just read out a few other statistics about the Whitehorse SES. They have over 80 active members in their unit, which makes them one of the largest units in Victoria. As I said, all of the members are volunteers, and they are aged between 26 and 77. Once in my life I was thinking of joining the SES because I know what great work they do, but it was just at the time that we were expecting our first child and I did not think that was the most appropriate time. But it is good to know that there is never an age limit, there is ever a time where you cannot start to volunteer. There is a huge age range, and we see people from all walks of life coming to help out on the SES, all types of professions. There are students, there are workers and there are retirees all coming to give back to their community, and I want to thank them all for it. The Whitehorse SES along with the Victorian SES in general does have a long history – 50 years this year. Originally it was the Nunawading SES; it is now the Whitehorse SES. They do a wonderful job. They want this fund delivered, and I support the bill.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (11:29): I rise to make a contribution on this great, big, fat tax bill that is just being introduced now under the guise of the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. There is quite a bit in that title that I will come to shortly. When you look at the purposes of this bill, it simply says:

... to amend and change the title of the Fire Services Property Levy Act ... to expand the coverage ...

But what it does not say is that this is another great big, fat tax grab because the government have lost control of their finances. They need an extra couple of billion dollars to meet their commitments and what they would like to do. They know no other way of growing the economy – cutting costs, reducing waste, getting on top of some of the issues on their Big Build projects – so their only other mechanism is to raise tax. This is a great big, fat tax, and it is also under the guise of the changing landscape of emergency services. To include the SES in this is not a problem, because they do some really great work, and I know people have talked about that. Of course everybody in this chamber knows the work that they do, supports them and is very grateful for the work they do. But also, I would like to just make sure that the government understands that some of their policies around the emergency services to date have seen a decrease in volunteerism. You see many CFA brigades around the state with morale that has been shot because they have been kicked around by this government too many times.

I want to give a very brief outline of some of the background, because it has already been told to us in full by the former Treasurer and member for Malvern. The fire services property levy came into effect in 2013, and it was in response to a royal commission recommendation. The fire services levy was inequitable, and from 1 July they introduced this new property-based levy, replacing the current arrangements of raising funds through insurance companies. So it moved to that property base from the insurance. It has been collected since that time in the council rates of all Victorians. That has gone

fairly smoothly. Not many people have come to speak to me about that to date. The levy was used to fund the fire and emergency services.

It is interesting that the government are whacking their charges. They are not just extending the coverage, but they are whacking the tax to collect so much more. They are really whacking Victorians here. I found it really interesting to look at 2013, when the coalition introduced this. The Labor opposition in August of that year wanted the tax reviewed because they thought people were paying too much. Well, goodness me, the Shadow Treasurer went on to become the Treasurer for a decade and taxed Victorians just continually. Every time we have turned around, we have ended up with another 55, 56 or 57 new taxes. He said at the time:

... some property owners have seen massive hikes, and self-funded retirees and community housing organisations are among the hardest hit.

What he has done with land tax to self-funded retirees since is just the greatest hypocrisy, if he really was sincere about this levy at that time. I doubt it very much. What also happened after this levy was introduced in 2013 was the following year the coalition was able to actually reduce that as well. We were able to introduce it and then take a look at it and think, 'Okay.' The average household in metropolitan areas, instead of paying \$193, was paying \$143. In a CFA area it was paying \$142 compared to \$262. We were able to bring the levy in, make it a lot fairer and then even reduce it. It did not take long for this government to get in and change the tune of what they think this should be used for.

This expansion is going to hit landlords, farmers and commercial businesses really hard. Over the forward estimates it is looking to bring in an extra \$2.1 billion. I think the most recent budget update talked about an additional \$610 million. The government in December announced a host of commitments that they say are contingent on this funding because they cannot do it at all. Some of those were about rolling fleet replacements and the volunteer emergency services equipment program grants. I have got to say they are years behind delivering on those already. Brigades and units that heard that they were getting a new apron, breathing apparatus or upgrades have been waiting for years for it to come to fruition. They are just rolling their eyes and thinking that this is just how the government treat volunteer services.

I have over 50 volunteer organisations within emergency services, the CFA mostly and six SES units. I know that at Hoddles Creek they have been waiting for years and years for their new station. Yes, they are supposed to be getting it, but they have been waiting for so long. Yarck have their old tin shed of a station in the main street. This gorgeous quaint little town of Yarck on the Goulburn Valley Highway has been waiting for years. It is not fit for purpose. We purchased the land when we were in government; that is how long they have been waiting. I know the SES at Mansfield are under particular pressure. They need a new station or unit, absolutely, because it is not fit for purpose. They have boats, they have dinghies. What they need is quite different. They have been waiting. They need the emergency services precinct, and they need investment in a new station. Alexandra – they need another boat as well; I think they need the smaller one this time. We do very much support the emergency services to help fund them. They do too much tin-rattling. It was not so long ago that they were asked to hand over all of the equipment – the trucks, all of that – that they had fundraised for for years to the government. They said, 'We paid for this out of our own pockets and we don't think the government should have the right to ask to own it.'

One of the most extraordinary things in this bill is that the fund will fund up to 95 per cent of the following budgets, and these are budgets that should be already paid for: the Victorian SES; Triple Zero Victoria; the State Control Centre; Emergency Recovery Victoria; Emergency Management Victoria and the emergency alert program and the emergency management operational communications program; Forest Fire Management Victoria, heaven forbid; and it will support some of the functions of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. This is government

business. This is what government should be using the taxes and revenue that they collect for, not an additional tax. It is just extraordinary that they will do so.

I am very alarmed at the amount that that is being slugged on farmers here. We have asked some questions of the government, and I have not had a response about how they determined the levels for the farms with a value of \$1.25 million or over \$5 million. I think we got ‘integrity measures’ as the response. A \$1.25 million farm is not really a big farm – it is not doing much at all – or even a \$5 million farm. Farmers have done it really hard, and a lot of them have mortgages. For the government to use our farmers as their cash cow is just completely reckless and irresponsible. They think all of these farmers have loads of money. Well, let me tell you, that is just not the fact. We have had floods, we have had droughts. They are going into drought at the minute. There are so many dams that are drying up in and around my area. One of my councils has had a look at how these farmers are going to be levied, comparing 2021–22 to 2024–25. For a residential assessment this is looking to be a 121 per cent increase. For farmland valued at \$1.25 million it is a 236 per cent increase, an extra \$922. If a farm is valued at over \$5 million, it is a 411 per cent increase, so \$3500. It depends on the value of your farm. As I said, you do not have to have a lot of acres to have a property valued at a couple of million dollars. A lot of them at that lower end are not viable as farms and people would have an alternative income.

I fully support the amendment put forward by the member for Brighton. I am concerned that if there is a lot of increased expectation on councils, they will not be recognised for this. The costs are being shifted to them. They need to be supported too.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:39): I am very happy to rise to speak on this bill. I think one has to take a bit of care here because you can say, ‘I really support VICSES and CFA, but I don’t want to fund them adequately.’ There is a bit of a contradiction there, and we are getting those vibes, if I can put it in that language, from the opposition. We are about making sure that through listening to our emergency services we actually deliver the support that they are looking for. I know, having talked to my local Port Phillip SES, as it so happens, that when there are extreme weather conditions and other serious matters that they attend to, they do not tend necessarily to be between 9 and 5. It is often 3 am, the ugly hours of the morning when it is freezing and not necessarily terribly pleasant. Nevertheless they put themselves on the line day in, day out, and we are extraordinarily grateful to not only the Port Phillip SES – I am just saying that because they are my closest unit that serve our local community – but of course all the services that are provided across the state for the incredible work that they do.

I will just speak to a couple of matters that have been raised in the chamber to provide some clarity, and hopefully that will assist the opposition with maybe seeking to support the bill. I should say the emergency services are currently already funded by government through tax and other sources of government revenue. This is just a more efficient way of funding the entities, bearing in mind something that has already been mentioned in the chamber: when we know that an extreme weather condition does not just pick one or another person but can impact anyone in the community, it is important that we back in our emergency services, these volunteer services, to do the important work that we value. I also meant to say that the CFA and VICSES are leading us on the definition of ‘eligible volunteers’, as is appropriate. What has led to the development of this bill is listening to them. I think maybe that should be considered too, that we have very much taken on board the advice that has been provided by the CFA and VICSES.

The other concern I have is when we are looking at the purpose of this bill, which is to allow government to fund a broader range of emergency services through the levy to better reflect the make-up of the emergency services sector. There is a further point I want to make here: it will also introduce a volunteer exemption from the levy for eligible CFA and VICSES volunteers and allow the release of a \$250 million support package for the CFA, VICSES and the VicEmergency app. I really question whether the opposition want to be part of blocking this \$250 million package for trucks and training and so forth. Do you really want to be blocking that? Because that is the net effect of what you are

doing now. I think you really want to think about taking that, I would say, very negative backward step.

I should also clarify that every single dollar raised is going to our emergency services. I have heard a lot of smearing and blurring of the lines, and I think we need absolute clarity on these points if we are going to have a decent debate on this issue. It will not be used on other matters. The legislation literally says that. We have a copy in the chamber. If the opposition are not clear on that, they can access that, because it is a really fundamental element when we are talking about how we actually fund these services. I hope very much that they will support it because it would be a darn shame, to say the least. I am actually minimising the impact when it comes to this \$250 million package, which I am happy to unpack a bit further in a moment.

We know we are seeing the huge impacts of climate change. One cannot resile from these facts. Yes, Australia has always been a country of droughts and floods. However, instead of happening every 100 years, they are happening with a shocking frequency. I know my local area is certainly a flood-prone area, to say the least, and so we need people we can rely on who will go out there and assist, as they do at any time of the day or night. We cannot just stick our heads in the sand and pretend that these dramatic changes in climate are not happening and therefore not fund this system appropriately into the future. I do not think that would be very fair or reasonable, and hence the imperative to get these reforms through today. The important point that I really want to reiterate is that it is about listening to the people who put their lives on the line to help their communities and showing them that they matter and that they should be supported fairly by government for the work that they do. You cannot say, 'Oh, yeah, I really love the SES, but I just really don't want to give them the funding they need.' You cannot have it both ways. Of course alongside the VICSES our other emergency services are also being asked to respond to increasing and overlapping natural disasters, so these are really prudent measures that have to be taken to be sure that our communities are able to be supported as best we can.

I should say – and I do want to emphasise – that every dollar raised will go towards vital life-saving equipment, vehicles, staff, training for volunteers, community education and recovery support for when Victorians need it most. I would hope that the opposition would gain some comfort from these facts, because surely these are elements that the –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: Well, I mean, if you do not want us to take –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is misleading the house. It clearly is outlined in the bill report, it is in the bill, that not every dollar of this tax goes to volunteers. I ask you to invite the member to correct the record.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): As the Speaker reminds us constantly in question time, we expect our members to speak but it is not the Chair's position to determine if something is factual or not, so I will ask the member for Albert Park to continue.

Nina TAYLOR: This is the point of having a debate: the opposition are entitled to put their point of view across as I am entitled to express the facts that are being put before the chamber. I should say there are elements in terms of streamlining this process, so the government has been undertaking consultation directly with councils and our emergency services. I am just going to repeat that: our government has been undertaking consultations directly with councils and our emergency services. So if those opposite do not agree with VICSES or CFA, well, they are entitled to that point of view, but we are listening to them, so I am just putting that out there.

We will also allow eligible volunteers to claim the rebate against a farm of which they are an owner, even if it is not their primary place of residence, making it fairer for farmers who do not live on their farms. So I am just pointing out some of the necessary caveats that are built into the legislation. We

will also allow the rebate to apply across a range of farm ownership structures, including trusts and companies and farm businesses with separately titled land, with a full exemption available for farms valued up to \$5 million, and we will also provide additional funding to support councils in the implementation of the fund. Just with that \$250 million package that the opposition are putting at risk, in December last year we announced that we would be delivering \$250 million directly to CFA and VICSES volunteers across the state because we need to recognise the hard work of our emergency services and the ongoing sustainability of units and brigades across Victoria. This will be funded through the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund and is conditional on the passage of this bill.

As part of the package the government will invest \$70 million to establish a rolling fleet replacement program for VICSES and the CFA, ensuring volunteers right across Victoria get new and upgraded trucks, tankers and pumbers to keep doing what they do best, and the popular annual volunteer emergency services equipment program will be doubled with more than \$62 million to ensure more volunteers have new or upgraded vehicles, equipment and better station facilities.

Timely, accurate and accessible advice is critical during disasters – that goes without saying – and that is why the Labor government will invest \$53 million in a modernised VicEmergency app and the central database for emergency services EM-COP. This will also make sure the app can be translated into different languages – also extremely important when we think of our diverse and multicultural communities – ensuring everyone has the information they need to keep themselves and their families safe. We are also supporting VICSES to upskill and train more and more volunteers by investing almost \$30 million to deliver training and support programs to local brigades. I commend the bill to the house.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (11:49): I am so happy I can speak on this bill to correct the rubbish that we have just heard from the Labor government, the spin and nonsense and the clear misrepresentation of the fact that this is just another great big new tax from Labor that will hit country people hardest. It will hit farmers the hardest. It will hit CFA volunteers who run the farms and who work on farms the hardest. It will hit every Victorian who enjoys eating Victorian food the hardest, because they will have to pay more for their food. It will hit people who are looking for rental housing harder, because there is no rental property that is exempt from this great big new tax from Labor. It will only be passed on to renters; they will be the ones who help to pay for this. They are what the facts are, and that complete and utter nonsense from the member who just spoke from the Labor government – to say that every dollar of this great big new tax goes to volunteers is just an outright lie. It is an outright lie. Even the Treasurer says that this money will go back in to fund core government services, core government services that they already receive tax revenue for that they are not using appropriately.

Nina Taylor: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am concerned about the use of the language ‘outright lie’. I think it would be unparliamentary.

Roma Britnell interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Member for South-West Coast, I would ask you not to contribute while a point of order is being made. I remind the member for Lowan about referring to someone as a liar. I know you said it was an outright lie – just be cautious.

Emma KEALY: Farmers’ contribution for this great big new tax from Labor will increase. It will not just increase a little bit, it is going to increase from \$76 million a year to about \$204 million a year. That is money out of country Victoria that is going to be funnelled into major core government services, which are predominantly to service people who live in Melbourne.

Our people are happy to pay their fair share of tax, but at the same time that you are putting a surrogate land tax on country Victorians to subsidise the fact that Labor cannot manage money, Victorians are paying the price. Country Victorians are paying the price, and they are putting hands in their pockets to pay even more tax for core government services and bureaucrats who sit on their bums in Melbourne and do not deliver for country Victorians. What they are paying more taxes for is more of those

bureaucrats, because it is not coming back to fix the potholes. It is not coming back to fix our crumbling road edges. It is not coming back to duplicate the Western Highway, where there are more and more fatalities every single month. It is not coming back to our region to help fund CFA volunteers to make sure they have got up-to-date appliances.

I spoke to a CFA volunteer the other day who could not get funding for a \$24 chock to put under the back wheels of the CFA truck so it did not roll back over them when they were filling up from a dam. How do you think that this great big new tax is going to go? Do you think it is going to go back to the CFA volunteers or the SES volunteers? No, it is not. And the government has actually outlined that it will not do that. So the member for Albert Park wants to say what she is doing with nuance and concern about saying, 'You're lying.' When you say that every dollar is going to volunteers, I can tell you, you can put your own language on it, but you know what, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, we know it is a duck.

Firefighters in my area are very, very concerned about this. I want to get some of this on the record. I wish I had an hour, but I know you are not going to give me an extension of time. This is so hard for people in my electorate, because it is the CFA volunteers who have spent the last three months on the back of fire trucks who are going to be contributing the most to this tax. I want to pay credit to all of those volunteers, all of the people whose land was being burnt at the same time they were on the back of a fire truck, the people who paid their staff to be on the back of a fire truck so they could keep that support going, not just for a couple of days but week on week on week. It was not just through Christmas, not just through new year and not just through the time that they should have been managing and doing some key things on their property; they were actually there fighting fires and standing up for their communities. These are the same groups that were involved in this fire that have been told they are not going to get as much money next year. They are the same groups who have given these outlines of what they are paying, more and more, in this volunteers tax, because that is what it is, and I want to get some of these numbers on the record.

In the Wickliffe area, there are about 400 private fire units that fought the Grampians fire. It was a huge cost. He wants to get the costings about this, which has not come through. He wants to invoice the state government for what he believes are unnecessary costs incurred that he should not bear, especially given the large amount that he pays in levies, and this is a huge amount of additional stuff. There is a huge amount of money that is being taken from our region, and it is not coming back to support our CFA volunteers.

Down in Hamilton, John Northcott got his rates notice this year – an increase in his levy of 90 per cent. Another volunteer, a very good friend of mine who has been impacted by fire and is also suffering from a cancer as a result of his firefighting, cannot access full coverage of his costs through the government's program, and we have been heavily advocating for that. He is going to be paying the price. His costs have gone up 70 per cent, plus he is facing even more through this new volunteers tax. For Pat Millear, a champion who heads up the Westmere fire brigades group, at the moment it has gone up by 60 per cent. There are some farmers in that area who are looking at their cost for this tax going from about \$24,000 to \$80,000 a year. There are hundreds of millions of dollars coming out of my electorate, and it is not coming back.

I did say earlier about this being a surrogate land tax. This is just a tax on farms. We know that farms are currently exempt from land tax, and this is just another way of Labor sticking their hands in the pockets of farmers who are doing their darnedest to keep our people fed, to keep them clothed and to drive the Victorian economy. Farmers find it very, very difficult to fund a higher rate. They always have high input costs, and they are struggling for water at this point in time. There is no doubt that this will come at some point in time as a tax on food. Every Victorian is struggling with the cost of living. Last week we heard that grocery prices have gone up by 30 per cent over the last six years under the Allan Labor government. This tax will mean that they will pay more and more.

The volunteers exemption that has been spoken about today is not a broad-based exemption. Rental properties are ineligible to be included, so what this means is that people who rent get no benefit out of the time that they volunteer, apart from feeling darn good about it, and good on them for getting out and doing it. You know what, I have seen those volunteer firefighters and I have seen volunteer SES workers, and they do an incredible job. They do it because they love it, and they do it because of the rewards that they get in the community and in looking out for one another. They do not deserve to be slugged with a great big volunteers tax. This just goes to show that Labor cannot manage money, and it is our country Victorians and our country farmers and our country volunteers who are going to pay the ultimate price.

I commend all of the councils in my region, because while it has been spoken about in this chamber – and contributions from the Labor government would indicate that there has been extensive consultation with councils – this is not what they are saying. They are saying that they have not been consulted and did not know that this tax was coming. I believe councils are willing to put on the public record their concern around this, and I have got articles in front of me which I have not got time to reference, from West Wimmera Shire Council, Southern Grampians Shire Council and Glenelg Shire Council. I spoke to the Little Desert action group last night. There was a motion from the Hindmarsh region that they outright reject this great big new tax and the money that it will take from our region when we get nothing in return under a Labor government.

If anybody has any heart at all, you will see this for what it is. This is just a tax grab. It is getting money to fill the budget black hole that Labor have created by not managing projects appropriately and by happily allowing for corruption on our major projects, with money being funnelled through to bikie gangs and the government doing nothing about it. My community knows exactly what that is about. It was another motion last night. They are sick of their taxpayer money going to Labor so they can just blow it on paying off bikie gangs. That is exactly what they were saying last night. That is not me, that was them. Everybody is sick to death of the way that this government thinks that taxpayer money is their own that they can waste and just fritter away on anything. Our people have had enough. Labor cannot manage money, and Victorians are paying the price. For once, stand up for CFA volunteers and vote down this tax.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (11:59): I rise to support this bill and to stand with every single emergency service worker across this state, including SES and CFA volunteers. I know at home, as we speak today, I have got many from my local SES station watching this debate with great interest and great support, and to them I say: this bill is about you and providing you with the funding and the resources you have asked for, you need and you deserve. The member for Lowan just prior to me stood up and said that her CFA station needs more funding, but at the same time she opposes the very bill that will raise the funding to improve services, to improve infrastructure and to improve resources for those very CFA volunteers. It is absolutely disgraceful, and that is why I rise to support this bill, because it is about the volunteers. It is about supporting those emergency service workers who make those selfless and brave contributions across our state and across all of our local communities.

Victoria's emergency services play those essential life-saving roles and they deserve our support, and that is what this bill is all about, which the Liberal-Nationals are opposing. Right across Victoria, including my community of Merri-bek, demand for emergency services only continues to rise to all-time highs. The facts speak for themselves: Victoria is one of the most fire-prone areas in the world, and in recent years we have seen a huge impact from climate change –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member appears to be reading a speech.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Pascoe Vale, are you reading from notes or reading a speech?

Anthony CIANFLONE: I am simply referring to handwritten notes, as I always do, Acting Speaker. The truth hurts, doesn't it? The truth very much hurts the member for Lowan, because when

we talk about volunteers, when we thank our volunteers in the emergency services, we back them in with funding, and that is what this bill, again, is about – \$250 million in new funding for our emergency services, which the Liberals do not support providing them. That is a fact. That is what they are opposing. We are seeing more floods, storms and fires. Black Saturday, the Black Summer bushfires and the 2022 floods have had real, lasting devastating impacts on all of our communities. Events that were happening only once every 100 years are, sadly, happening more often because of climate change. As I said, we always thank and regularly thank our emergency service volunteers in this place. This bill is about backing in those thanks.

Many from my local SES community have asked for this bill and this reform, and many of them have emailed and written to me. I would like to name and thank them: Goldie Pergl, Kate Turner, Lynne Clark, Shane Lapworth, Yehuda Harmor, Jon Saunders, Tom Timothy and Michael Casha. There are so many emails that I got from so many of our volunteers, I just want to thank as many as I can. They said:

I am writing to you as a dedicated member of the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) FAWKNER Unit to urgently request your support in securing sustainable funding to ensure all volunteers across Victoria can continue providing our community with an effective emergency response.

VICSES, as you may know, is a volunteer-based organisation committed to providing emergency assistance to minimise the impact of emergencies, reduce trauma in those exposed to emergencies and enhance community resilience across Victoria. Our volunteers, numbering over 4,800 strong, work tirelessly to prepare and respond to a wide range of emergencies, including floods, storms, tsunamis, earthquakes, landslides, and road crashes.

Our efforts are significant, as evidenced by the staggering 287,373 volunteer hours contributed between July 2022 and June 2023 alone, equating to an economic value of over \$503 million. Despite our dedicated volunteer base, VICSES is currently facing critical funding challenges that threaten our ability to effectively deliver essential services and maintain operational readiness.

The reliance on volunteer-led fundraising to procure vital equipment, maintain facilities, and replace end-of-life fleet assets is simply unsustainable.

...

As our elected representative –

yours truly –

we urge you to consider –

pressing issues, including:

... expanding the existing Fire Services Levy into an Emergency Services Levy to secure stable funding for VICSES.

That is exactly what I am standing up to support here today. The SES has 155 volunteer units with, as I said, over 4900 volunteers covering the entire state. Between 2009 and 2013 VICSES roughly averaged around 20,000 call-outs a year, and over the last three years they have averaged 35,000 call-outs. That is a massive increase over recent years, and that is why from 1 July 2025 we want to replace that fire services property levy with a new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, making sure our emergency services have the resources they need to keep us all safe.

The bill will amend the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 to replace the existing fire services property levy with an expanded Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund levy from July 2025. It will replace the fire services levy with that ESVF, which will include additional emergency services. It will be used to fund up to 95 per cent of the budgets of such organisations, including the SES, Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, the State Control Centre, and Emergency Recovery Victoria, which is the state's recovery agency. In addition, the ESVF will fund up to 87.5 per cent of Fire Rescue Victoria's budget and up to 95 per cent of the CFA's budget. It will support the delivery of an additional \$750 million a year when fully implemented and provide an extra \$250 million for the VICSES and CFA to support rolling fleet replacement, volunteer

training, doubling of the volunteer emergency services equipment program and modernising the VicEmergency app.

Every dollar raised, unlike what others opposite are claiming, will go towards each and every one of those organisations I have named to support vital life-saving equipment, staff vehicles, training, education, recovery support and much more – for when Victorians need it most. That is what the bill is about and what the funds raised will be about. It will introduce an exemption from the levy for eligible CFA and VICSES volunteers and life members on their primary place of residence or on a farm which they are the owner of. When combined, it will bring Victoria's funding into line with the rest of the country.

This bill will complement the efforts of our previous investments to support my local emergency services. On 15 July 2023 we officially opened the new SES Fawkner precinct, a \$2.8 million upgrade as part of a \$125 million VICSES capital works package for a new 5000-square-metre space with a five-bay motor room; modern kitchen; expanded office; learning and training spaces; and modern, fit-for-purpose IT and communications equipment. It will help the VICSES attract, recruit and retain more dedicated volunteers, continue to expand their reach to respond to local emergencies and support their efforts in working with Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and fire services. On 13 December 2024 I was delighted to welcome the Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes to the Fawkner SES – and the member for Broadmeadows – where she officially unveiled and announced this very bill and the additional \$250 million in funding we have committed to through this bill for SES and our emergency services. It was announced in Fawkner, which we are very proud of indeed.

In supporting the bill, I would like to again acknowledge many of my Merri-bek SES volunteers – some of whom are watching right now, live streaming it from the station, I believe – including unit controller Goldie Pergl; operations deputy unit controller Shane Lapworth; training director Jon Saunders; administration director Michael Casha; members director Kate Turner; and Amanda Opie as well, who is the community director and does a great job, especially with collecting the cans, bottles and containers for the container deposit scheme to fundraise for the SES.

Today's SES volunteers in my community build on a long-time tradition of local SES volunteerism. The Broadmeadows civil defence unit started in 1952, joining the State Emergency Service in 1955 – a bit of a history lesson here. They commenced operations at the Maygar army barracks site in Broadmeadows and then moved to Mahoneys Road in Campbellfield in 1999, next to the old pipeworks factory, which, sadly, is no longer there. They then moved to the existing Hadfield site on the corner of Sydney Road and Boundary Road in 2023, which we just opened and announced. I just touched on the funding of it. They changed their name to VICSES Fawkner unit to better reflect their location.

They work across Merri-bek and Hume. They have 63 members, 14 of whom make up the unit management team. Their volunteers train weekly, on Mondays at 7 o'clock, and respond to requests for assistance 24/7. They responded to 612 requests for assistance in 2024 and contributed over 10,000 hours of volunteer time to the local community. They have three trucks, one provided by the state and two by grants and fundraising, and two four-wheel drives. They also have a great lighting trailer, a staging/crime scene trailer and a flood trailer. They work across so many disciplines, including chainsaw, safe working at heights, land-based swift water rescue, air search and rescue, incident management, urban search and rescue, fire support, air monitoring, domestic rescue and land search rescue. They were involved in Black Saturday assistance. They have recently helped over in WA, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland. They even went out three times to the Grampians, the member for Lowan might be interested to note, to help out at the fires recently. As well currently they are in Queensland after Cyclone Alfred. They are an amazing unit that celebrated their 50th year in 2022 and many more of their achievements. I really commend this bill in the name of all the volunteers across our state, particularly the Fawkner SES, who do an amazing job to keep our community safe, resilient and prosperous.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:09): I rise to speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. This is a bill that facilitates the government of the day, the Allan Labor government, to bring in an extremely unfair tax on volunteers – much higher than we have seen in the past and much higher than I could ever imagine we would do to people. This is a disgrace. This bill is an absolute disgrace, and I cannot support it. This is a great big tax. This is a tax that will collect \$2 billion over the next three years. Unlike what we are hearing from these members across the chamber who are absolutely misleading the house, only 10 per cent of that will go to the CFA and SES.

This is a bill where the Allan Labor government have rebadged the fire services property levy as an Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. Much of this will not go to the hardworking volunteers; much of this will go to core government services. This tax will be listed on local government tax notices, as we have seen in the past, but we will see ratepayers suffering bill shock. They will not realise it has come from the state government and that the reason it has been so incredibly raised is because of the government's mismanagement of Victorian finances.

I am getting letters from councils. I am getting calls from councillors who are saying, 'Why do we have to be the tax collector of this great big tax?' They want to put on the public record that the government should not be standing behind local council and cost-shifting and making it difficult for them to stand up in their communities because they are forced to grab tax from the community, who are already struggling due to government mismanagement.

It is meant to be for emergency volunteer organisations, but the majority will be going to fund services which will be funded and should have always been and have always been funded out of consolidated revenue. So they are going to fund organisations that do not have volunteers that the government already fund; they are departments, effectively. This is purely due to government mismanagement and cost blowouts. They are just digging into the pockets of families because they are desperate, as a government, to find money. You have to ask the question: how much of this is going to fund their mates in the CFMEU?

The government has tried to present this to volunteers as a levy exemption to fund their trucks and equipment, but only 10 per cent of this massive tax grab will actually go to that cause. That is why the volunteers are so disappointed. They do not feel like they have been listened to and represented. When the fires in the Grampians were taking place over the summer period, so many were calling me. My CFAs who had gone up to that area to help their fellow volunteers were saying, 'It's a disgrace. This is a government that is expecting us to volunteer – and we want to do that, we want to protect our communities, we need the surge power – but they continually insult us and destroy our ability to keep up our resolve to keep volunteering,' because they just keep getting torn down by this Allan Labor government.

Local member for Western Victoria Jacinta Ermacora came out in December when this tax was announced and said that hopefully this will put an end to fundraising and sausage sizzles. Well, guess what, the government have admitted that one-third of voluntary emergency services organisations will have to fundraise for the rest of their funding. Jacinta, are you choking on that sausage? There is going to be a lot more fundraising. Absolute disgrace. Just yesterday –

Daniela De Martino: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, members should be referred to by their correct titles.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): I remind the member for South-West Coast to refer to members by their correct title.

Roma BRITNELL: The Treasurer just yesterday came out saying that this tax will be on landlords, who she says are home owners that can afford it, but really, as this government keeps missing, over 500,000 homes which are available for rent –

Pauline Richards: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am just checking if the member is reading from notes. Is the member reading from notes or reading a speech?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for South-West Coast, are you reading notes or from a speech?

Roma BRITNELL: I am referring to notes. There are over 500,000 homes that are available for rent. The government claims they are owned by land barons. They are not. Over 400,000 of these rental homes are owned by hardworking Victorians. 64,000 in fact are owned by teachers, 55,000 are owned by nurses, 41,000 by admin assistants and many others by tradies, electricians and truck drivers. The government believes that these are rich land barons that should pay more tax. They have only got one other house, which they are putting on the rental market because they are trying to save up to make their lives better and be able to perhaps fund their retirement – really reasonable goals – but the government calls them land barons when they are hardworking Victorians.

The Allan Labor government stated in their media release that every single dollar raised in this new fund will support our emergency and disaster recovery services. It clearly does not. Precious little will actually assist emergency service volunteer organisations. This new tax is supposed to help very worthy volunteer organisations, such as the CFA and SES. But the reality is it will actually fund core government services, as I said earlier, like Triple Zero Victoria, the State Control Centre, Forest Fire Management Victoria and Emergency Recovery Victoria, as well as Fire Rescue Victoria. These are not volunteer organisations; these are departments. Even the department secretary for the emergency services will be funded under this new tax. Only \$200 million of the billions being collected goes towards the equipment, and it still will not be enough for the equipment so fundraising still has to occur. It is so insulting to volunteers. Core government services that have always been paid for by the taxes we have already been paying – it will be going to these areas instead of consolidated revenue. That is because the government have mismanaged their budgets.

Two very worthy volunteer organisations who work very hard, and we have seen that recently over the fire period particularly, did request exemptions, including the CFA, so they could attract more volunteers. How insulting to them to not only not get a reasonable exemption but to actually have to pay triple the amount, which makes it a paltry exemption in the end. How insulting also to the other emergency service organisations who want to attract more volunteers. The Labor government have rebranded this as an emergency services fund, yet the volunteers of other organisations, such as coastguard, who put out fires on ships, St John ambulance, marine rescue Victoria and surf lifesaving, who are also emergency services, have totally been ignored. This is a government that picks winners and losers.

They are a government who have not even thought this through. They have not worked out how they will be getting that rebate back. A farmer who was paying \$2500, an average farmer, is now going to pay \$6000, nearly \$7000 actually, a year. They are going to get an exemption of \$109 back if they go to the trouble of finding, on the State Revenue Office website, how to do that. It will probably take them a couple of hours of wading through that to get \$109 back. It is the most insulting contribution; the government could not be more insulting if they tried. The government will also cap the eligibility. They have gone right down the line of working out how they will cap people. They do not know who is actually going to be eligible yet. They are saying, ‘We’ll leave that up to the CFA and the SES.’ They have worked out how to vacuum up all this money and bring it into their coffers, but they have not worked out yet how the paltry \$6 million that goes back in exemptions out of the billion that they collect this year alone will even be allocated back to the people who are eligible for the rebates if they are.

So who is benefiting? It is not farmers, who have been working hard fighting fires for years and managing the landscape. What will farmers do when these costs go up to \$7000 for the average farmer, and much more, as we heard from the member for Lowan, in some cases? It will be passed back to the consumer. We have seen grocery prices are already high. The consumer will struggle.

John LISTER (Werribee) (12:19): I rise to speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. Our emergency services personnel and volunteers are on the front line of Victoria's natural disaster and emergency response. They put their lives on the line every single day without a second thought. My time as a CFA volunteer has instilled in me the importance of ensuring our emergency services are well resourced and well equipped, particularly in my role on the brigade management team. My brigade, Werribee CFA, responds to an average of 800 incidents per year, and we are on track to hit 1000 for this year, which I think says a lot about the need for these changes. That is over three calls every day, with nearly a third supporting paid firefighters at nearby stations 57 and 58.

The day I was elected I was out at 3 am putting out a grass and scrub fire out the back of Manor Lakes and protecting the community I now have the privilege of representing in this place. While I was out there, just like every other time, the importance of having adequate support was front of mind. I was surrounded by brand new tankers funded by the Allan Labor government, driving one of those tankers myself.

This bill is exactly what the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund is all about. It amends the fire services property levy to replace that with a new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. It is about making sure our emergency services volunteers and personnel have what they need to keep us safe. We know that climate change is real, and we are feeling the impacts each year, particularly in the CFA. We have seen our fire season stretch into March and now April. This is a serious problem, and we need to have a sustainable funding model that will continue to support volunteers year on year as we see the effects of climate change. It is affecting all types of communities. I acknowledge the communities in the Grampians that have had it rough; my former comrades at Dimboola fire brigade copped it this summer as well. But it does not discriminate; it is not just the bush, it is also our interface suburbs, like Werribee, Wyndham Vale and beyond. As conditions worsen and the intensity of fires increases and other severe weather events increase, our emergency services are feeling the pressure. That is why we are introducing this new way of funding them.

Every single dollar raised by this fund will go back into our emergency services. For the first time it will be used to fund up to 95 per cent of annual budgets for the SES, Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria, and I will come back to some of the comments from the member for South-West Coast in a moment on those different agencies. It is also going to fund up to 95 per cent of the CFA's budget and up 87.5 per cent of FRV's budget. That means that we will have more vital life-saving equipment, vehicles, staff, training for volunteers, community education and recovery support, importantly.

Volunteers who give up so much of their time, effort and lives helping our communities are the reason so many across Victoria are still able to have their homes, belongings and lives. We calculated at Werribee fire brigade that the average time spent by each volunteer at an incident is around an hour and a half, and if we are responding with multiple of my comrades on those trucks, that is dozens of hours every day of those people's time.

This government recognises this. I recall during the debate about presumptive legislation and fire services reform many people called on government for some recognition of emergency service volunteer work through our state revenue system. This is why eligible volunteers will be able to offset this levy through their eligible organisation. They will be able to claim the rebate against the farm of which they are an owner, even if it is not their principal place of residence, making it fairer for farmers who do not live on their farm. This reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting the work of volunteers, who take so much time, like me at 10 o'clock last night when I got home from Parliament, to look after our communities.

But this is not just about the tin shed fire brigades that we associate with the Country Fire Authority and the amazing work they do, and I recognise a lot of the Nationals representatives here, and a lot of those small brigades that they represent do amazing work, and that is often what we see on the news

at 7 o'clock at night – we see those brigades – but this is also about those SES volunteers who are out in some of the worst flood and natural disasters that we are increasingly experiencing. I would like to thank Mike and Goldie, who knows me from a previous life, for their advocacy for this change. On Monday night I met with the Wyndham SES unit at their training night. Their group controller Mark Schier took me through the different emergencies they respond to. Working closely with local police, they can be called in to help with crime scene support and at a moment's notice could be searching through bushland for a missing person. At some of our big house fires they come and set up lighting and salvage equipment. Mark and I reflected on the last time that we saw each other when were both at Wattle Avenue in the middle of the night, where their lighting helped us on a long salvage effort on a three-storey building that I happened to be inside of when it was on fire. For 50 years our SES have proudly stood by their fellow emergency service workers, and it is about time they were given the same funding security and recognition of that work as the fire services through this modernised levy.

The member for South-West Coast raised the other organisations that will be funded through this levy, and I would like to reflect on that. Some of those organisations, like Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, all those other ones, and Forest Fire Management Victoria, are not just bureaucrats sitting here in Spring Street. They are people out in our incident control centres in the bush. They are out there supporting volunteers to do their jobs. We need to make sure that we have a sustainable funding model so that everyone on that fireground works together, because we emergency service workers work as one – unlike the member for Berwick's bin fire of an opposition.

We have heard a lot about our amazing rural fire brigades. This levy recognises their work, as I have mentioned about that rebate for principal place of residence, farmland or a portion of land they have an interest in. What I would also like to highlight is a great proportion of our CFA are peri-urban brigades like mine. We are backing our suburban brigades with upgraded facilities and new appliances. In the Mount Cottrell group that Werribee is a part of, a new fire station at Truganina has been constructed and we are working through one at Wyndham Vale. New modern tankers are at Little River, Truganina and Werribee, as well as a new pumper tanker that they are trialling at Hoppers Crossing. Those opposite are standing in the way of \$250 million of equipment for my fellow volunteers to use, and I think they should be ashamed.

I know I have got myself worked up, but this is something I am very passionate about. Someone asked me, 'Are you going to give up your volunteering now that you're a member of Parliament?' I thought about it briefly. We have to be here at all sorts of hours, and I am stuck here in Spring Street when I would rather be back home on Watton Street. I was reflecting on it. Trucks still need to get out the door. We need to make sure that our trucks are out the door every night in Werribee and across our state, and our volunteers are a vital part of doing that. We need to stand with them and back them with these changes to make sure that they have a sustainable funding model into the future as well as that important funding that will come from it.

Last night I got home to Werribee from here at Parliament, and the pager went off straightaway. I apologised straightaway to my partner, who looked at me disappointedly because she had not seen me for about 14 hours that day. I apologised, I got in the ute and I went to the fire station. Off I went, proud to see that our first truck at Werribee was out the door in under 2½ minutes. We have to be out in 4 minutes. We were out in 2½ minutes, with all three of our trucks out within 6 minutes to this code 1 emergency. We got down there. It was okay. It was just someone burning off without a permit. It happens too often, by the way. For those watching at home, please get a permit during a fire danger period. It has kept me up way too much at night – literally.

When we got back, one of our younger members, who has just bought a house – lucky; I am still renting, so I rib him about it all the time – asked me about the levy bill and asked when I was speaking about it. I said hopefully at about 12:30 today. With a cheeky grin, he asked if he could get a note to say he could get his rebate now. I laughed. I had to politely decline, but I assured him that today I would fight to make sure that we get this legislation through. That is how keen our volunteers, particularly our volunteers in the suburbs, are to see this recognition happen.

In concluding – because I am still new at this and I am still trying to get my time right – this bill will mean that our volunteers, who give so much to our state and its people, can keep doing that important work that they do. I have to say on behalf of my fellow volunteers at Werribee, in particular our captain Michael Wells, and the people of Werribee: I commend this bill to the house.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (12:29): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. I want to start by acknowledging and thanking Victoria's SES volunteers for everything they do in our community and also congratulate them on 50 years of very hard work, the tireless hours they commit during times of disaster, whether it is attending storm damage, bushfire recovery, road accidents or searches. Whatever it is, they give their time and work hard when it is needed in their communities. Of course they support other communities around Victoria as well as interstate, and obviously we know that that is happening right now in other states that are in need of assistance. The fact that our amazing SES volunteers are prepared to give their time to other states and other communities as the need arises just shows the calibre of those volunteers and their commitment to supporting our communities, to keeping our communities safe.

They do spend a lot of time away from their families, and I do want to acknowledge that. Sometimes it is for days on end, and not just for first-responder situations but also for training – use of equipment, driving the trucks – education, fundraising and all those situations that they have to deal with as volunteers with the SES. For many volunteers there is an impact on their families and recreation time because of their commitment. Just recently I was talking to the Bannockburn SES volunteers, and some of them have been volunteers for many, many years. I acknowledge that they have missed out on different things with their families – taking their kids fishing, whatever it might be – because they were called out to an incident. And as mentioned, sometimes that can be for days, sometimes it is an incident that lasts a number of hours, but it can impact on their family and what they are doing with their family. So again, a huge thank you to them for giving up their time. I think sometimes our communities forget that they are volunteers and that they are giving up their precious time with their families or doing recreational activities, so we should be reminding our community that that is exactly what they are doing. We need these incredible people.

The SES Geelong unit and the SES Bannockburn unit play a critical role in supporting my community. As I mentioned, I recently visited the Bannockburn unit. We had the pleasure of having a get-together to celebrate the fact that they now have the land to build their new Bannockburn SES unit on, which has been a long time coming. I was so pleased to join the Minister for Emergency Services out there last week to celebrate that but also to thank those volunteers for not only the work they do but the advocacy and time they put into getting this new SES unit in Bannockburn. Bannockburn is a growing community. It is fast growing, actually. The SES volunteers saw the important need for an expansion of their service. They were co-located with the CFA. That had worked for quite some years, but they have now outgrown that space and need the additional space. So to have that celebration last week was really important to them. It will give them dedicated training spaces, wellbeing areas, parking – things that they have not had for a long time – and the ability to park their second truck under shelter, because at the moment it needs to be kept outside because there is no room at the current station that they are at. As part of modernising those facilities, the unit will also feature environmentally sustainable materials, including solar panels and water recycling, which is of course really helpful to those volunteers.

The legislation will effectively amend the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 and replace it with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund Act 2012 to allow government to fund a broader range of emergency services through the levy to better reflect the make-up of the emergency services sector. The bill will also introduce volunteer exemptions from the levy for eligible CFA and VICSES volunteers and allow the release of the \$250 million support package for the CFA, VICSES and the VicEmergency app. It is important to note that by opposing this bill those opposite are blocking that \$250 million investment in more trucks for the CFA and the SES. We know how important those

facilities are for those emergency services, so I would ask that the opposition support this bill. It is really important that that money is invested for the CFA and the SES. We know the value of the work that they do. We need to be providing the funding to them, and this is the mechanism to get that funding so that they can deliver those important services.

We also know that Victoria is one of the most fire-prone areas in the world, and in recent years we have seen a huge impact of climate change and population growth in our state. I certainly know in my seat of Geelong, which also now incorporates Bannockburn, just how much we are going to need those services more and more. Obviously we do not have bushfires in central Geelong, but now that I have Bannockburn in my electorate, which I am very happy about, these are things that are on their agenda every single day. Whether it be the local council, the local community, the SES or the CFA, they know that the demands are going to grow. That was the discussion I had with them last week. They know the population growth in Bannockburn is far exceeding predictions. They know that they are going to need these services more and more. They have a great volunteer team out there, but some of those people work. Because they work, they are not necessarily able to respond to calls during the day, and that means that there is another group of people who are not working that are required to respond. Developing their volunteer base is really important for them, and they are doing more work. I think it makes it more attractive to have a whole new SES unit based at Bannockburn. They will be working to continue to build up their volunteer base.

We are seeing not only more floods and storms and fires – with Black Saturday, the Black Summer bushfires and the 2022 floods – but also the very real and lasting devastation that brings to our communities. We rely on those volunteers to go out and do that work. Whether it is putting tarps over roofs, cutting people out of car accidents or dealing with flood damage, whatever it might be, it is part of their everyday life, really, to be there and available for their community. I really do admire their commitment to community.

We have spoken about the families who have lost their homes, the loss of our natural environment and farming lands, and how we know that the communities affected by these disasters have been changed forever. And each time, we come back to acknowledging and thanking our emergency services, because time and time again it is our VICSES and CFA volunteers who have stepped up to keep us safe. This bill is about listening to our emergency services, listening to the people who have put their lives on the line to help their communities and showing them that they matter and that they should be supported fairly by government for the work they do. I can only stress the importance of this bill for ensuring those funds for the investments into SES and into CFA. It is absolutely critical that this passes this place today. Again, I ask the opposition to reconsider their objection to this bill. It is really important that we continue to support our communities. We know that SES volunteers have come to us saying, ‘We need more.’ How do we fund that? This is the bill that does. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (12:39): It is a pleasure to make a contribution on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. I will start off by making the point that, as much as the government wants to talk about supporting our emergency services, this bill is primarily around a new tax. I do not think there is any member in this chamber who does not support their emergency services. In my electorate I will go as far as to say we probably rely on our emergency services and volunteers more than any other area in the state. Our volunteer CFA firefighters are the backbone of our community; our SES do a great job; and down to our surf lifesavers, who look after the beaches along the Ninety Mile Beach there, it is an area that is highly dependent on volunteers. But this bill will increase the cost of living and create a new tax. The bill says it is expanding to include supports for the SES and Triple Zero Victoria and those sorts of entities, but they were previously funded out of general revenue. So if this is not about simply raising a new tax, the government must show us where that commensurate saving is in general revenue. I have not heard a speaker yet outline that. There is an extra \$600 million to be raised. That has got to come from

somewhere, and it will be coming out of the pockets of property holders. It is simply a case of moving the funding of agencies, previously provided out of all the other taxes we paid, to a new levy.

The renaming of the fire services property levy fools no-one. I was here when that came into play in 2013, and there are a few in the chamber who were not. The reason that it was moved from insurance onto council rates is because there were a number of people in our community who benefited from our fire service response who either were not insured or were underinsured, and those who were paying full insurance were paying overs. The idea of moving it to the rates-based system was that everybody who was a recipient of fire services had to pay their fair share. I can remember sitting in my office with people ringing my office saying, 'I'm not insured. Now I have to pay this new tax.' 'Well, yes, you're the very person we're trying to catch, because you were a beneficiary of the fire services when the fires hit last year.' That was a common discussion. That was the background to it. The fire services property levy made it fairer on everybody.

The other services that this incorporates have always been funded out of general revenue. There was not an intention to include them in the fire services levy at the time. But if we want to do that – and no one is denying our SES and Triple Zero need greater levels of support to deal with the challenges that they have to deal with. I do not think any member of the chamber would disagree with that. But it is cost shifting. We are raising over \$600 million to fund those services. Someone point us to where the tax cuts are coming out of general revenue, because what is happening is that money is still going to be collected and it is going to go into paying this excessive debt and the interest on this debt that the current government has incurred. Over a million dollars a day in interest we are heading to, a billion dollars every six weeks in interest, without paying off your capital. So it fools nobody that this is anything other than a tax grab.

The impact that this will have on housing and rental properties is disastrous. We already have land tax increases being passed on to renters. We have rates and insurances for rental providers going through the roof, and now we are going to have another tax. Your mum-and-dad investors – and there are plenty of mum-and-dad investors; the majority of investors in second properties are mum-and-dad investors – will leave and either invest interstate or go into the stock market. Rental properties will again be in decline, and then we will have people coming in from both sides of the chamber saying we have got a housing crisis. Housing availability is not there, yet we have introduced taxes that are putting pressure on rental providers and forcing them out of the system. You just cannot have it both ways. It is as simple as that.

I spoke to one of my councils last week, and we had other councils from Gippsland in this week from our area, the Gippsland local government network – now known as One Gippsland, I should say. They spoke openly about their concern that this is going on their rate bills. They said people only read the bottom line of their rate bills. How can they put up rates when the fire services levy on that rate bill is almost double before they start? One councillor said, 'If we put up rates to any level, it will exacerbate the blowout on the bottom of that council bill, and we'll end up with pitchforks in the street.' That was the term that was used. So I would urge the speakers on that side who are yet to speak on this bill: if this is not a new money grab, stand up and tell us whether \$610 million in savings is coming out of general revenue, because that is where the SES, Triple Zero Victoria and these agencies have previously been funded from. Explain why you are doubling the fire services levy but not giving the tax respite in another area.

I want to briefly mention the exemptions that have been promised. I cannot believe we are in this chamber debating a bill that talks about exemptions for CFA volunteers and we have no detail on how it is going to work. I heard the member for Frankston before, and it sounds like CFA volunteers are going to have to pay their levy and then be bothered to fill in the paperwork to get the repayment returned to them. I mean, what a disastrous system that will be. Will all volunteers be eligible for this? The volunteers who attend every fire? I am assuming they will be. What about the non-active members of the CFA – do they get it? Because when this has been discussed in other jurisdictions in the past, that has caused angst within those services.

What about our surf lifesavers, who I touched on before? What about our ambulance community officers (ACOs)? They do pretty important volunteer work in our community, just not in the area of fire – I would say equally important work in our community. Are they going to be able to access this eligibility to not have to pay? The bottom line is we are debating another bill in the chamber where the government are openly saying they do not know how it is going to work, that detail has got to be sorted out.

It would be good if we had a bill come into this chamber where all the details were sorted out so we know what we are actually debating and we can prosecute the detail of it. That is how this Parliament should work. That is how a Parliament in any jurisdiction should work. We should be debating and prosecuting the detail, not having people standing up and saying, ‘Here’s the bill, here’s the law, but we’ve got to work that stuff out down the track. Just trust us.’ We should be debating that detail in here, and I only hope that between houses we get that level of detail so that we can prosecute those matters and make sure there is even and fair representation.

I would like someone to stand up there and tell me if our ACOs and our surf lifesaving volunteers are going to be eligible for this exemption just like our CFA volunteers are. No-one has touched that yet. All we are getting is, ‘Oh, we’ve got to work all that stuff out.’ Well, that should be here in front of us now. I will conclude my remarks with that. I know there are a lot of people that do want to speak on this and we are running out of time today. I have spoken for longer than I intended, but gee whiz, it would be good to get some answers at least between houses.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (12:48): It is a pleasure to rise in favour of the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025, and from the outset I would like to thank the Treasurer in the other place and her team for their efforts in bringing this important piece of legislation to this house. I trust that these changes will make a positive impact for Victorians. I also note the excellent contribution by the member to my left the member for Werribee and his erudite speech on sharing his experience as a CFA volunteer with both Dimboola and Werribee. Again, it is great to have a new yet lived-experience voice in this chamber. This is an important piece of legislation that builds on the Allan Labor government’s record investment in our emergency services. Since coming into government we have stood by, not against, our emergency services personnel, who do such a wonderful job in serving the Victorian community.

Since 2013 the fire services property levy has been the primary source of funding for our fire services for both the Country Fire Authority and Fire Rescue Victoria, formerly known as the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. This levy is collected by local councils on behalf of the state government, and this process is monitored by the State Revenue Office. It is a system which is fair and equitable, and it is based on both fixed and variable charges which include property classification, location and capital-increased revenue. The purpose of this bill is to replace the existing fire services property levy and transform it into the expanded Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, and this change will allow the funding of several additional fire and emergency services. This new levy, starting on 1 July this year, will fund up to 95 per cent of the annual budgets of numerous emergency and volunteer services as well as allowing for the release of a \$250 million support package for the CFA and the VICSES that this government committed to, and therefore it is absolutely critical this legislation is supported. The ESVF is estimated to raise more than \$610 million in the years 2025–26 and more than \$765 million in the 2026–27 year. Every single dollar of these vital funds will be used to purchase and maintain life-saving equipment, vehicles, recovery support as well as volunteer training.

To further emphasise this point as to why this change is so important, I want to take a moment to go through each emergency service that will be funded through the reformed levy policy. The Victorian State Emergency Service, known as the SES, is a volunteer-based organisation that provides critical support in times of flood, storm, fire and other emergencies. The volunteers provide immediate responses to minimise the impact of emergencies in cases of natural disaster such as floods, storms, tsunamis and earthquakes. This quick and on-the-ground response is appreciated by Victorians in both regional and metropolitan areas, and I know this applies to my local area as well. The team at the

Forest Hill SES and the Monash SES do an incredible job in the Glen Waverley district in supporting them during their most critical times. I would like to thank the unit controller Graeme Stanley and his team at the Whitehorse SES and unit controller George Haitidis and his team at the Monash SES for all they do to help our community in our most pressing times of need. We literally saw this last year in the Monash area when we had some very severe storms that particularly hit Monash. We had over 1000 jobs that the Monash SES replied to over about a period of a week. Basically we had trees come down and trees land on people's roofs. There was debris all across the Monash area, and over several weeks the Monash SES quietly and diligently went about their job to clean up that mess and ensure that people were looked after. It was great to have the Premier down there at the end of that busy week to thank the Monash SES and all the volunteers that were still helping out at that stage. Such rapid responses not only help those in need in the moment but also set the groundwork for an easier clean-up in the aftermath. They also lead emergency management plans to help protect the community, with more than 5100 SES volunteers serving our state.

The ESVF will also support Emergency Management Victoria, which leads the management of emergency situations when they arise by coordinating responses as well as strengthening the Victorian community's ability to prepare and respond to emergencies. The changes to the funding model will also assist in strengthening the work of Triple Zero Victoria, and I recently had the pleasure of visiting Triple Zero Victoria that is located right in the centre of my electorate, just off Burwood Highway. I got to see the amazing work that Triple Zero Victoria do, and it was great to have the Minister for Emergency Services there visiting with me. I was fortunate to be able to listen in to a couple of calls by the wonderful Archer. It was just amazing to see how good she was in responding to these people that are calling with very difficult circumstances. The professionalism that I was able to see from her gave me great strength and great hope about the great work that they do to make sure that Victorians are kept safe.

Triple Zero Victoria serves as a critical link between the people of Victoria and the emergency services agencies that they rely on in times of need. It is where the calls are received for 24 hours a day, and it is where cases are triaged and help is dispatched. This magnificent institution is located on Lakeside Drive in Burwood East, and the new structure will fund both the State Control Centre and Emergency Recovery Victoria, as well as Forest Fire Management Victoria's role within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. In addition to what is already a wide range of changes, the funding model for the CFA and FRV will be reformed.

Although I do not have a CFA in my electorate, the headquarters of the CFA are in my electorate. They are located not far from Triple Zero Victoria. I also got to visit that with the Minister for Emergency Services, where they have got a lot of training that is done there. All the CFA members can come from across the state, come back to that location and be upskilled in training so that they are best prepared when we need them the most. We had some vision goggles, where they put me in a fire situation where we were trying to put out an EV fire in a garage. We got the fire out, which was good. It was good to see technology that was created here in Victoria by Deakin University, obviously creating technology to train the next generation of our volunteers in making sure that they can help our state when we need it.

The transition to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund will mean that the CFA's budget will go from a fixed 77.5 per cent revenue to now receiving up to 95 per cent of its funding from the new levy. I remember as a candidate going out and visiting the Monash SES and George and his team, and George was on my back from the first moment he met me with regard to the fact that when we need them in a time of crisis they will be there. The issue is that then they have to go out themselves and shake the tin on the corners of streets and raise funds that way. I am happy that this bill will make sure that they do not have to do as much of that work. I am very happy with this bill being passed here today. This is in conjunction with the continuation of the existing \$50 concession for veterans and pensioners. It means that this levy will be applied fairly while still meeting the intended objectives.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1177

Victoria as a state is unfortunately very susceptible to natural disasters, including fires and floods, and this of course is exacerbated by climate change. I used to live out in Meredith when I was a young lad.

Michaela Settle interjected.

John MULLAHY: It is a wonderful place, member for Eureka. I remember we had a fire just up the back of our farm a couple of farms away. We dashed up there to give a hand, and it was just great to see the Meredith CFA there when we needed them the most.

I have got a few more things that I would like to say, but time is getting away. In thanking our hardworking emergency service staff and volunteers, who are always there to keep us safe – our families and puppies alike – I urge the Victorian community to always stay vigilant and aware of any potential dangers. Your cooperation will help our emergency services to protect our community and keep us safe, including saving 000 calls for emergencies. I commend the bill to the house.

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (12:58): I have a couple of quick observations on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. It is mutton dressed up as lamb. It is a tax dressed up as a levy. The primary producers of our great state are really copping it from the behind. I have been here for a while now, and it is interesting to observe the number of members that are successful in winning a popularity contest in their respective districts who have experience with firefighting and those sorts of things. For the new member for Werribee, there are quite a few more of us that have actually been on the fire front and put the wet stuff on the red stuff too, mate. You have got people here that leave the politics behind when doing that. It is the same for my old mate from Frankston. We put that down and set our swords aside and protect our great state.

Significantly, there is a lack of transparency and honesty in relation to the intended outcomes of this bill. I have heard in the house, watching it on the telly downstairs, the number of people that have said that this is going to return \$250 million to new equipment and blah, blah, blah. Let me tell you, it is going to raise in the next three years –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Benambra, it is now time to break for lunch.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Crime

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. New Victorian crime data shows that in the last year residential aggravated burglaries are up by 27 per cent, car thefts have increased by 41 per cent, youth offences are up by 16 per cent and total crime is also up by 16 per cent. These numbers are the highest they have been in 10 years. Premier, why has the Labor government failed so spectacularly in managing crime in Victoria?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): Acknowledging the Leader of the Opposition's question, there was data released today that demonstrates that the hard work that Victoria Police are doing to keep our community safe must continue to be supported. I do want to at the outset also acknowledge all victims of crime, because behind each of these statistics are families, people and individuals who are victims of crime. Our thoughts are with them, but not only our thoughts; we are listening and acting. Alongside those additional investments we are making in Victoria Police, we have the most police on our streets of any state. Also, as the Minister for Police has mentioned, they are making a record number of –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the police do do a tremendous job, but the Labor government is failing to manage crime. The Premier is debating the question.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

1178

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, can you state your point of order at the outset, please, without commentary. There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition in his question referred to two particular offences where we have seen an increase, around aggravated burglary and car theft. That is exactly why we have introduced this week into the Parliament – it is before the Legislative Council today – the toughest bail laws in the country, which go exactly to these issues.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Yesterday the Clerk was worried that we would not have a quorum in the chamber, so I advise members to be silent.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual; it is under sessional orders.

The SPEAKER: As the Manager of Opposition Business knows, it is not for me to determine the facts of an answer. It is a requirement of members to be factual.

Will Fowles: On the point of order, Speaker, Speaker Brooks back in 2020 – and this is at page 155 of *Rulings from the Chair* – said:

The Chair can require that a minister is being direct, factual, succinct and relevant to a question but cannot direct them how to answer the question.

The ‘Content of answers’ sessional order provides that questions ‘must be direct, factual, succinct and relevant’. You often find whether responses are relevant, and I am just interested to know why the distinction is drawn between whether an answer is factual as opposed to whether an answer is relevant.

The SPEAKER: If the member for Ringwood wishes to question my rulings, he is welcome to come and see me in my office after question time.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was referring to before the point of order, referring directly to the offences that were referenced in the Leader of the Opposition’s question, that is exactly why we have introduced into the Parliament this week – and it is my expectation that the Parliament passes this week – the toughest bail laws in the country, which go directly to these issues.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier’s answer must be factual to the question that is asked. Referring to the toughest bail laws – they are not even the toughest bail laws we have had here in Victoria, let alone the toughest bail laws in Australia.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order, and I ask that you rule the Leader of the Opposition’s point of order out of order. The Premier is being entirely relevant, direct, factual and succinct in relation to answering the question that was asked.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that I cannot determine whether an answer or even a question is factual. It is reliant on members to be factual. There is an expectation that members will be factual.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition referred to a number of offences where we have seen an increase in crime, but I would also like to draw the attention of the house to the family violence crime that has also risen, referring to the media release from Victoria Police that Victoria has experienced an all-time record. That is devastating for those families, particularly for the women and children. That is why again I thank Victoria Police for the work that they are doing in terms of the investments they are making, particularly to keep women and children safe.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: My first point of order, Speaker, is that the Leader of the House just made a very disparaging remark towards me, and I ask you to ask her to withdraw.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House, will you withdraw?

Mary-Anne Thomas: I withdraw.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, the Premier has just conceded that crime under her watch is out of control. On relevance, the question was about the Labor government failing to manage crime in Victoria, and I ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. I ask the Manager of Opposition Business not to repeat the question in her points of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Family violence is a crime. You do not get to choose which crime is the crime you are focused on and you are concerned about. Family violence is at record high rates in this state, as evidenced by the work that Victoria Police is doing, and demonstrates why we are making the investments we are. There should not be a debate like that that is being led by those opposite in this place, that family violence is something we should not be concerned about. It is absolutely central to the work that Victoria Police is doing.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Consumer Affairs can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Consumer Affairs withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 118, the Premier has just made a disparaging remark to members across this side – an imputation on members from the Premier, who has consistently been soft on crime.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The Premier did not mention any particular member of Parliament. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Brad Battin (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): Premier, youth crime is at the highest level since electronic records began in 1993 directly because of this government's weakened bail laws. Does the Premier seriously expect Victorians to believe that the Labor government that caused this crisis is the right government to fix it?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): In answering the question from the Leader of the Opposition, Parliament is not going to rise this week until we have the toughest bail laws in the country pass through this Parliament, and that is for the Leader of the Opposition to determine.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, answers to questions must be factual, and the Premier cannot continuously stand up and talk about the toughest bail laws in this country when they are not the toughest bail laws in this state. You cannot continue to mislead the Parliament.

The SPEAKER: I reiterate that I cannot determine the facts of a question or an answer.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Parliament is being asked to consider passing this week the toughest bail laws in the country. Those opposite are all about appearances. The Leader of the Opposition –

BrIDGET VALLENCE: Speaker, I renew the point of order under sessional orders. The Premier is not being factual about the bail laws before the Legislative Council at the moment. She simply is not. She is being disingenuous and misleading the Parliament and Victorians.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business continues to defy your very clear direction in relation to your powers when it comes to addressing the Premier and her response to the question that is being asked of her. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order and that you request that the Manager of Opposition Business not waste the house's time with continuous frivolous points of order.

The SPEAKER: I have ruled on this point.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

1180

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Speaker, standing order 58(1)(a) requires the Premier to be factual. Multiple members have raised their concerns that the Premier is misleading this house. If it is not for the Speaker to determine whether the Premier is misleading the house, whose job is it?

The SPEAKER: If you wish to ask the Speaker a question, member for Brighton, you are welcome to come and see me after question time in my office. I have ruled on this point of order several times now.

Jacinta ALLAN: If the member for Brighton is so concerned about how this Parliament uses its time, those opposite will put aside their amendments and get this bill passed immediately – amendments that are all about appearances, not about the substance. Whilst they were on holidays last week, we were doing the hard work, the detailed work, to put the toughest bail laws in this country.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members will be removed from the chamber without warning.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: Pride events

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:14): Pride includes fabulous events like Victoria’s Pride street party, which draws over 50,000 people into the heart of Melbourne. It includes vibrant, diverse communities around the state. Just have a look at our bursting regional Pride events calendar. The annual Midsumma regional activation program has successfully held 14 rural and regional events showcasing these extraordinary talents, stories and communities. This program also contributes significantly to the visitor and economic activity of our regions. There is Gippsland Pride day this weekend, Gaytimes in the member for Monbulk’s electorate, Bendigo Pride in your electorate next weekend, Speaker, and then you have got Castlemaine Pride later this year. There are the Geelong Pride festival, which I am sure the member for Geelong is looking forward to, Out in the Open Festival in Shepparton and Drag’d Out Beechworth in Benambra, and the list goes on.

Over Labour Day weekend the members for Macedon and Wendouree, federal colleagues and I joined the Victorian commissioner for LGBTIQA+ communities Joe Ball and his beautiful family at the annual ChillOut Festival parade in Daylesford. We saw an enormous amount of joy, creativity, celebration and inclusion, with floats from local schools, the CFA, Scouts and more. Artists and performers I spoke to, some of whom had travelled from Melbourne, told me how frequently they are booked for performances in regional Victoria, highlighting just how wonderfully inclusive we are and the economic benefit that comes from this inclusion across our state.

Disappointingly, yesterday some members of this Parliament tried to weaponise Victoria’s rainbow community by demonising a simple and inclusive rainbow libraries toolkit for librarians. We have also seen some in this place vote against our anti-vilification bill, and sadly some did not even turn up to vote at all on this important bill. Nevertheless, the Allan Labor government will continue the work to ensure everyone in this state is safe, equal and respected.

Bail laws

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:16): My question is to the Premier. Premier, aggravated burglaries in Victoria have gone up by 27 per cent in the last 12 months, with nearly one committed every hour in Victoria. How many of these offences were committed by offenders who were out on bail under the Premier’s weakened bail laws?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:17): In thanking the Leader of the Opposition for his question, I reiterate my thanks for the work that Victoria Police are undertaking in dealing with and supporting victims of crime and dealing with and supporting the Victorian community to keep us safe, because focusing on community safety is my priority and my government’s priority, and it is my expectation that it is the Parliament’s priority this week as well, which is why we have brought the tough new bail laws to the Parliament, and I expect those laws to be passed this week.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was about the increase in aggravated burglaries and how many offenders were on bail. On relevance, I ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that very narrow question.

MARY-ANNE THOMAS: On the point of order, Speaker, the response to the question was entirely relevant. She was asked about bail and she is talking about bail. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

THE SPEAKER: The question was very direct. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question, but I do remind the Premier of the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: In terms of the reference to aggravated burglary, that is exactly why that has been added as one of the new offences that will face a tougher bail test. We have the opportunity here, the Parliament has the opportunity, to move quickly today to pass these laws that are before the Legislative Council.

Members interjecting.

THE SPEAKER: I am reluctant to remove any more members, or we will not have a quorum. However, I ask the member for Pascoe Vale to apologise to the house now.

Anthony Cianfalone: I apologise, Speaker.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, the question was specific about how many people were on bail and committed these offences. This is not talking about future changes, it is talking about those who were on bail at the time.

THE SPEAKER: I ask members not to repeat the question in their point of order. I remind the Premier to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition does not want to talk about future changes, because he is doing his best to delay these future changes that we are wanting to bring into the Victorian community.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, not once but twice the Premier has defied your ruling. This is about aggravated burglaries committed in the past, not about the crystal ball of your future weak not so tough bail laws.

THE SPEAKER: If the Manager of Opposition Business cannot state her point of order at the outset, I will not hear it. On relevance, I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: My focus and my government’s focus – those of us on this side of the house – is on community safety, which is why we have done the hard work. We have brought the bill to the Parliament. The question for the Leader of the Opposition is: why are you getting in its way?

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:20): Can the Premier explain why the stronger measures for reoffenders, including the amendments put by the Shadow Attorney-General, were glaringly omitted from the Labor government’s new bail laws?

THE SPEAKER: The legislation is in the upper house. I ask members to be very cautious.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): Speaker, in taking your advice I will speak broadly on the amendments that have been referred to, because of course there have been some amendments that have been put. Do you know what the focus of those amendments is? It is all about style over substance. It is all about the title, not the outcome. It is all about the appearances, not seeing tougher new bail laws passed through the Parliament. The Leader of the Opposition has had his liquid paper pen out. That is what he has spent the last couple of days doing: rubbing out the title instead of doing the hard work.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lara is warned.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier is not being relevant.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked by the Leader of the Opposition about his own amendments in the Legislative Council. You then directed me to be very careful and speak generally around the amendments in the Legislative Council, and that is exactly what I am doing. While some have been busy putting liquid paper over the bill, more focused on the appearance than the outcome, more focused on covering up having been cruising the high seas, we have been doing the hard work, and that is what we will continue to do.

Ministers statements: major events

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:23): I rise to update the house on why we are the major events capital. Melbourne is the only city in the world to have both a grand slam tennis event and a grand prix, and we have been smashing attendance records lately – for example, the best ever grand prix attendance in Albert Park, the biggest ever women's Ashes attendance, the biggest ever Australian Open crowd and in 2024 the biggest ever Boxing Day test attendance.

Last week was a really big week for events in our state: the Formula One Grand Prix; the Kusama exhibition at the NGV, as the Minister for Creative Industries knows; *Beauty and the Beast* at Her Majesty's Theatre; the Port Fairy Folk Festival, which I loved; the Lost Trades Fair in Bendigo; and the Frida Kahlo exclusive exhibition in Bendigo.

Next week there is a Royal Caribbean cruise departing Brisbane for seven nights. It is departing next Friday, in fact, at 4:30 at the Brisbane International Cruise Terminal. For those opposite: you might get to spend some quality time with the Leader of the Opposition, but I would encourage you not to go, because you will be missing so much in Victoria.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, former Speaker Brooks has said that ministers statements are an opportunity to countenance government policy. Perhaps the minister has none, but I would ask you to ask him to desist from attacking the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I also countenance the minister to come back to his ministers statement.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: My point is: do not leave Victoria for Queensland on a cruise ship because you will miss the Avalon air show, you will miss the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival, you will miss the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, you will miss the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show and you will miss the Castlemaine Fringe Festival in the Speaker's electorate, the KaBloom festival in the member for Monbulk's electorate and the national golf tournament in the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party's electorate.

We are making our major events calendar even better. Under this Premier we have secured the first ever NFL match in this country. Under this Premier we have secured the first ever NBA match in this country, and we have locked in the Boxing Day test for years to come. We are one of only three cities

around the world, outside the US, to have NFL, NHL and NBL, and we do that by staying in Victoria, not cruising up the Queensland coast.

West Gate Tunnel

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:26): My question is to the Premier. Labor's West Gate Tunnel is set to blow out by another \$1 billion. The corrupt CFMEU has been fined \$168,000 for thuggish bullying and abusive behaviour on this project. How much of the total blowout on this project has been caused by corrupt union activity?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:26): The Leader of the Opposition got one part of his question correct and the rest of it incorrect. The part that was correct was of course that Labor is getting on and delivering the West Gate Tunnel Project in partnership with its construction partners. The bit that the Leader of the Opposition got wrong, though, was the claim he made about the cost of this project, because the advice I have – how could I not be any more relevant? I quoted his question.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual. The CFMEU was fined for bullying public servants, WorkSafe inspectors and police, so I would ask you to ask the Premier to be factual.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was answering the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The West Gate Tunnel Project is on track to be delivered, consistent –

Matthew Guy interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: The former Leader of the Opposition is muttering away over there. He remembers those years when he opposed the project, he blocked the project, he fought against the project. Well, guess what, the project is being delivered, and it is going to make a difference. It is going to get trucks off local roads. It is going to provide the member for Bulleen and others –

Matthew Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, I ask you to stand and apologise to the house.

Matthew Guy: I apologise to the house.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very narrow about the blowout of costs on this project going to corrupt union activity. Could you ask the Premier to be relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER: I have the question in front of me. The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is a project that is going to bring benefits. It is also going to provide an alternative to the West Gate Bridge, and we all know about when something happens and there is an incident on the West Gate Bridge. Indeed I remember well there was a day – perhaps it was when the member for Bulleen was the Leader of the Opposition – when there was a serious accident on the top of the West Gate Freeway that had a massive knock-on effect across the road network. Do you know what was happening in the Parliament at that time? The Liberal Party was opposing the project, trying to block the project in the Legislative Council on the very same day.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker – we also know it was the CFMEU who were blockading the West Gate during the lockdowns, but anyway – the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: That is why this is such a vitally important project. The project is being delivered consistent with the agreement that was reached with Transurban and its subcontractors in 2021.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

1184

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:30): Will the Premier commission a comprehensive audit into how much money spent on the West Gate Tunnel Project has been fleeced from taxpayers by bikies and organised crime, or will the Premier continue to preside over endless cost blowouts?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:30): I will repeat comments I have made previously to the Leader of the Opposition. If the Leader of the Opposition has any allegations to make of the sorts of behaviour that he is referring to, I would suggest he makes them to Victoria Police. Secondly, in terms of the investments that are made in our infrastructure program, those investments are accounted for in the budget papers. They are updated annually and half-annually, and that information is provided through the budget papers.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, not only is it factually incorrect that this government puts everything in its budget papers, but on relevance, Speaker, it was about whether the Premier will introduce an audit on the expenditure for this particular project.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, the investments that we make are accounted for in the budget. I know previously those opposite have referred to audits. We all know that is code for cuts – cuts to projects and cuts to those thousands of jobs and those families that rely on those pay packets coming home every single week.

Ministers statements: public transport

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:32): This Labor government has a very proud history of supporting our tourism and major events sector by delivering world-class public transport services. Whether it is getting hundreds of thousands of fans to Taylor Swift or making sure there are extra services to head to the footy, we know that getting to an event and getting home safe are just as important as the event itself.

Those in the chamber that may have been interstate on holiday last week may have missed that Melbourne hosted one of the biggest events in our sporting calendar, the Formula One Grand Prix, and in the lead-up to that event we announced that fans could catch one of the 4800 extra tram services running to and from Albert Park over that four-day event. Over those four days hundreds of thousands of people used those special tram services to get to and from Albert Park, with a combined 387,000 trips taken to and from the grand prix by tram – that is about 78 cruise ships. And on the Thursday of that grand prix weekend our regional V/Line network saw more than 98,000 trips taken to both the grand prix and the footy, which is our busiest day on record.

Not only did we run all those additional tram services and have a buster day on the V/Line network, we also set up designated rideshare and taxi drop-off and pick-up points around Albert Park. On Friday I met with the team at Safe Transport Victoria, who were at the event to ensure that passengers who were using a rideshare or a taxi were getting a fair deal and that drivers were complying with the law.

While some of those opposite may have been cruising the Great Barrier Reef last week, we were supporting hundreds of thousands of Victorians and visitors to make sure that the grand prix was one to remember.

Health system

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:34): My question is to the Minister for Health. Why is the government selling the Royal Women's Hospital's vital family accommodation, forcing mums with sick newborns and women needing cancer treatment onto the street?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:34): Firstly, I reject the premise of the question, because the member is

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1185

wrong on many, many counts in the way in which she has phrased her question. If I can put the facts on the table, let me begin by stating that the Royal Women's Hospital made a decision last year –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for South-West Coast, could you stand and apologise to the house.

Roma Britnell: I apologise.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: The Royal Women's Hospital made a decision sometime last year to close a run-down accommodation facility that they had operated, and that closed in October. Since that time the Royal Women's Hospital, in the way that other major metropolitan hospitals operate, has worked with its patients to meet their individual needs and to ensure that they are able to access other low-cost accommodation options. There are a number of points, again, that are quite incorrect in what the member said, and that is the fact that this was a decision that was made by the Royal Women's Hospital.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:36): The government is offering rural and regional women and their families a \$45 per night accommodation allowance under the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme when the average cost of a hotel room last year was \$234. The scheme has a massive backlog, with payments taking more than eight months. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, why is the government forcing rural and regional women to pay for expensive hotels or be denied the care and support they critically need?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:37): I welcome the question from the member for Euroa because it gives me an opportunity again to correct her misunderstanding of exactly what is happening here. The Royal Women's Hospital works with its patients to meet their individual needs, and that includes accessing low-cost accommodation or other accommodation as that family may need. On the second point can I say that this government has an absolute commitment – one that is opposed by the member for Euroa – to increasing the care that is available for people in rural and regional Victoria through the implementation of our *Health Services Plan*.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. I ask you to ask the minister to come back to the very direct question.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Health, come back to the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I was saying, our government's commitment is to actually expanding access for care for women and babies in rural and regional Victoria.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mildura, I ask you to stand and apologise to the house.

Jade Benham interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mildura can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: maritime infrastructure

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:38): The word of the day is *deja cruise*, and it is *deja cruise* because I have stood here before and I have talked about our massive investment in piers and jetties and I am back to say so much more. Let us take a cruise around Port Phillip Bay. We have recently delivered one of the biggest pier redevelopments at St Kilda Pier, and the member for Albert Park knows all too well that Victorians have voted with their feet, literally flocking to the new pier.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, there are not any cruises coming in after 2027 – because of your taxes.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I caution the member for South-West Coast about how to raise a point of order.

Melissa HORNE: Also, the member for Sandringham will be pleased to know that just a short cruise down the coast we will be delivering a brand new pier for the Hampton community later this year. Ports and piers contribute more than \$900 million to our local economies through tourism, marine activities and of course cruise shipping. A great example is in my own electorate of Williamstown. Just last week we had Liam Neeson cruising down Altona Pier. Local traders had a huge win having a Hollywood production crew in Altona, and now we have got a Victorian pier making its big-screen debut. Cruising to the western side of the bay, the member for Bellarine has been working tirelessly for her community with the St Leonards Pier rebuild. Cruising out around the Heads and around to Western Port, the member for Bass and her community cannot wait for construction to kick off on north and south jetties at Warneet.

But are we stopping there? No, we are not battenning down the hatches. I am working with the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events on a brand new Victorian cruise shipping strategy for the future of our incredible heritage-listed Station Pier, and I am really happy to extend the stakeholder consultation to the member for Berwick.

Construction industry

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:41): My question is to the Premier. This week the Premier has refused to answer serious questions about the Big Build, including why the government has failed to ensure the safety of women on construction sites, whether certain individuals are employed on Big Build sites despite failing to attend them, how long the Premier has been aware of bikies on Big Build sites, why bikies are still profiting from the Big Build sites after almost a decade, why the Premier has failed to stamp out corruption and how much of the \$50 billion in blowouts is caused by organised crime on Big Build sites. As the Premier has been unable to answer these questions, why won't she call a royal commission so Victorians can get the answers they deserve?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:42): I genuinely do thank the member for Nepean for his question, because it gives me an opportunity to give the same answer I gave to this question yesterday when I was asked about a royal commission on this matter. I know the member for Nepean was ejected from the chamber this week, so he might have missed that this was a question that has been already asked in this house this week. But I will be delighted to answer it again. I think we all now know why the Leader of the Opposition did not ask this question, because he was here and he knows that this is something that the house has already addressed over the course of this week. So with the indulgence of the rest of my colleagues, I will direct this answer directly to the member for Nepean for the personal briefing that the member for Nepean has clearly asked for through his question.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, the standing orders require the Premier to be direct. We are a minute into her answer, and she has not gone anywhere near answering the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier will come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I have previously been direct on this answer this week, so I will repeat it again. In terms of the question about a royal commission, my focus is on taking the action now that needs to be taken to stamp out the rotten culture, and as I have answered previously in this house over the course of this week I have outlined the range of actions that have been taken. Also, we have seen previously here in this country, a number of years ago, that a royal commission was held into these matters. It took two years, and all it resulted in was five failed criminal investigations. What I am focused on is supporting the work that the federal government, through its administrator, is doing now

and the work we need to do here in Victoria, which I have outlined previously to the house, rather than something that would take years and not achieve focusing on the issue now. I have zero tolerance for this behaviour, which is why we are taking the actions immediately.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:45): Why does the Premier continue to spout rhetoric about protecting women and workers while running a protection racket for bikies and organised crime that have infiltrated Victoria's Big Build sites?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:45): I absolutely reject the premise and the frame of this question. I am proud to be part of a government and a labour movement. The reason why unions have such an important role on worksites around this country is because of their focus on worker safety. Protecting the rights and safety of workers, whether they are on construction sites, whether they are in hospitals –

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual, and the facts of the matter are that women and workers are being bullied, intimidated and harassed on government worksites. I ask you to ask the Premier to be factual.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was clearly rejecting the imputation. We are absolutely 100 per cent committed to supporting safe workplaces for all people, but particularly women. Women on worksites deserve the best of union representation, which is why we are working with the federal government and with the administrator to stamp out this rotten culture.

Ministers statements: recreational boating and fishing

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:46): Here in Victoria there has never been a better time to go out and catch a fish or be a boater here in this state. People love catching fish, and that is one of the reasons why we have stocked 66 million fish and also made it cheaper and easier for Victorian families. They might like to cast a line or they might like to get out on the water, cruising around one of our fabulous waterways. To support this work we have abolished fees across all of Victoria's 415 public boat ramps. Do you know what this does? It does not just help make it easier for people to get out on the water, it also means that they can save their money and they might have a bit more money to spend on some bait and tackle or maybe even to buy a cocktail from the ship's bar. It is all extra money in people's pockets. Also, right across the state we have built and upgraded new platforms –

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual. She has sacked so many workers from Victorian fisheries –

The SPEAKER: The Premier to continue.

Jacinta ALLAN: Touchy, much? Of course we know that the one in 10 Victorians who participate in boating like participating in boating right here in Victoria. Also, thanks to our Better Boating Fund, \$100 million of Victorian licensing fees have been invested back into facilities. It means there is a great opportunity to go and drop an anchor in Queenscliff – not in Queensland. Now is a fantastic opportunity also in St Leonards, in Inverloch and in Echuca – cheerio to the former Leader of the National Party. We support investments in Echuca, Lake Boga, Clifton Springs, Warrnambool and so many more. We are making these investments because we know Victorians love getting out on the water. They love getting out on a boat, dropping a line and supporting our great Victorian-based industries. That is why whether you are a fisher or a boater you have got our government's support.

Tim Richardson: On a point of order, Speaker, there have been probably about 25 points of order taken today, some of which have been on ministers statements around relevance, which is not a standing order in that it is about a factual basis. But on more than 20 occasions the Manager of Opposition Business has narrated on the point of order against your rulings – that was not the member

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

1188

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

for Brighton's previous form – and consistently has not followed your rulings now for three days. I just draw your attention to that, Speaker, for your consideration on how those points of order are taken.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Tim Richardson: I ask the member for South-West Coast to withdraw.

The SPEAKER: I ask you to withdraw, member for South-West Coast.

Roma Britnell: For referring to him as the member for behaviour change?

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast will withdraw.

Roma Britnell: I am just wanting some clarification.

The SPEAKER: You need to withdraw – no question.

Roma Britnell: I withdraw.

Brad Battin: On the point of order, Speaker, I note the member for Mordialloc's argument around the number of points of order called from this side of the house. The only reason that the points of order have been called is because this government cannot stand up here and be factual or relevant to the questions that have been asked. This week we have asked 13 questions here in this chamber, and of those 13 questions we still do not have one single factual or relevant answer. I ask you to call the point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. There is no further point of order. If the member for Mordialloc wishes to question my rulings, he is welcome to come and speak to me in my office, as is the Leader of the Opposition.

Constituency questions

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:51): (1060) My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier ensure that Community Housing Limited (CHL), the site managers of the Homes Victoria New Street housing site in Brighton, cooperate with police investigations? Premier, the Homes Victoria site in Brighton is dangerous. As you well know, I have repeatedly raised the rampant violence at the site, including aggravated burglaries, with you. Two nights ago a violent stabbing occurred. As one resident said to me:

... groups of people were running up and down the hallways on multiple levels ... the situation was chaotic and highly distressing for residents.

Another said:

The disturbance sounded so violent I contacted police at 2.30 am. I am told Police attended in huge numbers, along with an ambulance.

Yesterday Victoria Police contacted me to seek my help in calling on the government to force site manager CHL to stop frustrating police investigations. Police claim CHL refuses to provide police with video evidence of crimes. I call on the Premier to ensure this government cooperates with police.

Mulgrave electorate

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (14:52): (1061) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. How many public transport users have benefited from the recent changes to the route 800 bus service? Since 24 November last year the route 800 bus has been made more accessible for Victorians. The modifications include buses running every half hour during the day and every 40 minutes in the early mornings and evenings on weekends. This has resulted in 51 new services on Sundays and 37 on Saturdays. Additionally, the expanded operating hours during the week provide more travel options and better access to late-night shopping, as well as transport home for workers and

students. Peter Parker, a local advocate, has emphasised the significant benefits these changes have brought to the residents of my electorate. I am proud that the Allan Labor government is diligently working to expand public transport. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Minister for Public and Active Transport and the Minister for Transport Infrastructure.

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:53): (1062) My constituency question is to the Minister for Environment, and the information I am seeking is when the new Cape Conran cabins will be open. On 4 September 2020 I asked the minister when they would be open. The minister replied on 12 October 2020 and said they would be open by Christmas 2020. They are still not open. We were then told 2022, we were then told 2024, and lo and behold, I was up there the other day and the sticker has been changed to 2025. But I am told by parks staff it is unlikely to happen this year – after we were told Christmas 2020. It is not good enough, and I ask the minister when those cabins will be open so that members in this chamber can enjoy a lovely holiday in East Gippsland at Cape Conran.

Ashwood electorate

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (14:54): (1063) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and is in regard to the importance of age restrictions on the use of e-scooters for my constituents in Ashwood I ask the minister: how have these age limits been determined? I recently had the opportunity to meet with the fantastic senior students of Ashburton Primary School when they visited us here in Parliament with Mr Berger from the other place, and one of those students, Eli, stopped me and was talking to me about e-scooters. He wrote to me after that and wants to know why people such as him, being I think in primary school, are restricted from using e-scooters. Eli expressed his concerns over this, and I ask the minister to please get back to us with the information, and I will share it with Eli and his colleagues at my first opportunity.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:55): (1064) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Why has it taken him 12 months to respond to my email correspondence of 8 March 2024, in which I referred to him a highly commendable recycling proposal by Hayley, the then captain of Rowville Secondary College and the daughter of my local Rowville constituent Emma. As Rowville Secondary College captain in 2024, Hayley was tasked with implementing an initiative which would benefit the college and the wider Rowville community. Hayley subsequently proposed that a Victorian government container deposit scheme refund point be co-located at Rowville Secondary College in association with promoting a pro-recycling ethos throughout the college and the community. For Hayley and the Rowville Secondary College it is extremely disappointing that it has taken you a year to respond – *(Time expired)*

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:56): (1065) My question is to the Minister for Climate Action. Minister, can you provide the number of constituents in the Bellarine electorate who participated in the Solar Homes program? With solar now installed on approximately 30 per cent of homes across Victoria, up 14 per cent from 2018, the Solar Homes program has played a key role in enabling households to reduce energy costs and lower emissions through rebates, interest-free loans on solar panels, hot-water systems and solar batteries. Given the strong commitment to sustainability and emissions reduction in the Bellarine electorate, I look forward to the response on how local residents have engaged with and benefited from this program.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:57): (1066) My constituency question today comes from a resident of the town of Speed and is for the Minister for Police. When might there be a permanent police officer between Ouyen and Warracknabeal, which is an area of around 16,000 square kilometres? Residents

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

1190

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

of Speed are concerned that they will once again be without a police officer as of tomorrow, 21 March, and given the rise in crime rates once again, including incidents in the Yarriambiack shire rising by 22.1 per cent and several officers now on leave whilst those remaining have the rest of that area to cover, can the minister confirm for the residents when there might be an officer to service that area? The Yarriambiack Shire Council has been really proactive in implementing community safety programs focusing on crime prevention, community engagement et cetera, et cetera, but these residents are really concerned for their safety, and they seek some reassurance on when they can sleep safely in their beds.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:58): (1067) My question is to the Minister for Children, and it is regarding the Victorian government's redress scheme for care leavers. How is the processing of applications to the redress scheme going, and are there any timelines for when payments will commence? The Victorian government's commitment to establish a redress scheme for people who experienced abuse and neglect as children in institutional care is a very important acknowledgement for those Victorians who experienced physical, psychological or emotional abuse and neglect in orphanages, children's homes and missions before 1990. This redress is an important step for many constituents in my electorate who continue to grapple with the pain and trauma they endured while in institutional care during that time. Can I also take this opportunity to acknowledge Leonie Sheedy, the CEO of the Care Leavers Australasia Network and a fierce advocate for the rights of care leavers. Leonie has supported countless care leavers right across the state to make applications to both the national and now the state redress schemes, and I commend her for her tireless work in our community.

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:59): (1068) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the question I ask is: what is being done to improve safety and visibility for cyclists and pedestrians near the entrance to the underpass on the western side of Jacana station? Concerns regarding collisions and frequent near misses between pedestrians and cyclists at this location have been raised by residents on the Glenroy community page. It has been suggested that safety, visibility and sightlines could potentially be improved by the installation of curved mirrors at the entrance to the underpass. The Glenroy community page is a great resource for locals, and it shows the community at its best when people assist and advise each other. I thank active local resident Beris Hammond and local transport advocate Michael O'Connor for suggesting residents raise this issue with me. I look forward to the minister's response regarding the matter.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (15:00): (1069) I would like to raise a question to the Minister for Education. Why did the minister and his department endorse Swinburne University to sell the land on which the Windsor Community Children's Centre is located? The land was gifted to Swinburne by the Baillieu government to be used for education and community purposes, not sold for development. The sale of the land would result in the closure of this much-loved centre which provides high-quality child care for more than 100 local families. Swinburne could not sell this land without state government endorsement. Quality child care is vital for families. It provides excellent socialisation skills for children and support for families and caregivers that work or require respite for themselves or other family members. It is vital for the constituents of Prahran to be able to have access to ongoing quality child care and not be faced with this anxiety-causing situation. The government, which claims to represent families, should be ashamed that they are allowing this to happen.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, in terms of unanswered questions – and I have raised this point of order on a number of occasions – I have a number of questions that remain unanswered by the Minister for Finance and Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs. They are questions on notice 1621, 1622, 1623, 1763, 1897, 1932, 1935 and 1967. That is eight questions to the

minister which are unanswered still. Questions to the Minister for Water in the other place, question on notice 1930, and to the Minister for Ambulance Services, question on notice 1972, both remain unanswered. I would appreciate a response for my constituents.

The SPEAKER: Can you make sure that the clerks have the list, please.

Bills

Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:02): I am pleased to rise today in support of the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. I thank the Minister for Finance for introducing the bill as well as the hard work and contributions the Treasurer and the Minister for Emergency Services have made in developing this legislation.

In Victoria we are lucky to have a broad and varied array of services ready to protect us from everything life can throw at us. From Fire Rescue Victoria to Triple Zero Victoria and the SES and CFA, our community is served by great institutions that make great sacrifices to keep the rest of us safe. If you have been paying attention to the national news recently, you will have watched the destruction caused by ex-tropical cyclone Alfred with a vexed combination of fear and awe. We have all been devastated by the pain and loss experienced by our northern neighbours. At the same time, I have been struck by how our courageous emergency response forces have stepped up to save the needy and endangered in the path of Alfred and indeed the trail of destruction it left behind.

For those Queenslanders that did not have multimillion-dollar harbourside mansions in which they could wait out the storm and schmooze big business, institutions like the SES and Triple Zero have been the difference between recovery and ruin, life and death. All of this stands to reiterate one crucial thing: as much as we hope it will not, when the time comes that nature throws its worst at Victoria, be it fire, flood or cyclone, we need our emergency services to be ready, resourced and supported to get the job done. That is exactly what this bill is about. Acting Speaker De Martino, I am sure in your own electorate of Monbulk you have seen firsthand the impact that Mother Nature can have on our community and the work that the SES has done to support that community of yours and mine alike.

This legislation will allow the government to fund a broader range of services, thus better reflecting the realities of the sector as it exists in Victoria today. As it stands, Victoria stands alone in the emergency services funding model. Other states have had a singular levy contributing to the funding of emergency services for a while now. They have done this, and we are following suit. It makes sense that despite their varied operational responsibilities these organisations, which share a primary purpose of keeping Victorians safe, are fairly and transparently funded through a single source of revenue. Up to \$19 of every \$20 that the SES, Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria and many more are given will come from this fund. I want to stress that every dollar raised will go towards vital life-saving equipment, vehicles, staff, training for volunteers, community education and recovery support for when Victorians need it most. At the same time this reform will mean our services are better funded, and that is a change that is coming not a moment too soon.

Those opposite, by blocking this bill, are actually blocking the \$250 million investment in more trucks for the CFA and SES, and they should be ashamed of themselves. As we all know all too well, Victoria is one of the most fire-prone jurisdictions in the world. Even so, our emergencies are bigger, more frequent and more devastating than they used to be. The impact of climate change is exacerbating the extremes of our natural disasters and the pain they cause. Who would have thought in the middle of March that we are getting 31-degree days. That tells us a lot about the effect that climate change is having on us, and we need to respond and support our emergency services. It is not just fires; we are reckoning with bigger, harsher and more frequent floods, storms, heatwaves and cold snaps. To put it

simply, once-in-a-lifetime weather events and natural disasters are becoming a natural part of Aussie life. We all know that the very real and very lasting destruction these crises bring is not solely measured in material loss, though that is extremely hard to swallow. It is also the mental, physical and emotional scars of these catastrophes that linger far longer than the harm to infrastructure or the state's bank balance. We often speak about such events in this place, acknowledging the hurt, the loss and the selfless work of emergency responders, professional and volunteer, those people that have been on the scene from response to recovery. It is my position and that of the government that we should act on those sentiments. Actions speak louder than words.

The new funding that this legislation provides ensures that our emergency services have the boots on the ground and that our emergency workers have the resources they need to step in, step up and save lives even more effectively than they have previously done. This is not just a nice-to-have. The repercussions of our climate crisis, which Aussies around the country experience every single day, make it a necessity. It is not enough to let our emergency services merely scrape by and operate in austerity, having the tin rattle on weekends and those barbecues they do every weekend at Bunnings, as great as they are. We need to be helping them out. We must invest in their work, because in doing so we invest in our safety, our security and our community.

I have come to this conclusion over the course of my tenure as member for Mulgrave. In that time I have had the pleasure of meeting many of our brave community heroes – some volunteers, some professionals – each and every one of them remarkable and inspiring in their devotion, dedication and tenacity in preparing for and responding to those crises. I am particularly influenced by a recent meeting I had with the community branch of the State Emergency Service in Monash, where it became very clear very quickly that the men and women of the service were aligned in their belief that Victoria's existing funding model left the service worse off than equivalent state branches and indeed the state fire service. Whilst I am on the topic, a big shout-out to George Haitidis and the crew at the Monash SES and to Daniel Pastean and the crew at Greater Dandenong SES for their hard work and their resilience but also their passion for helping others. But they have stressed to me the importance of such a change, and it is evident that many other representatives in this place have heard the same cries for help and advocacy for change. They know, as we do, that a new form of funding will put our crucial emergency services in a more comfortable financial position and, crucially, allow them to invest in their operating capabilities, thus aiding their long-term service provision. This is not just money, better balance sheets or a healthier bottom line for the management side of these organisations, these are lives saved, homes recovered and livelihoods protected. That is who I will be thinking of as I vote to support this bill becoming legislation: the families of Mulgrave who rely on the capable operation of their emergency services to respond when things go bad and just to be there when they are good, providing valuable assurance that they have got their back should their luck change. It is something that allows me and millions of Victorians to sleep easier at night, and when we back our services in with this new funding, we will all rest even easier. Again, I would like to thank those hardworking volunteers and their families for the sacrifices that they make to keep us safe, to look after us, in these times of need.

I have heard time and time again from my local SES that this levy is needed. If you just look up the website of my local SES, they have publicised that this levy is crucial to them and is very much needed. I support all the emergency services. I support the SES. I support keeping our communities safe. And on that, I commend this bill to the house.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:12): I rise this afternoon to absolutely contribute to the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. This bill is another massive tax attack on regional and country Victorians. This tax attack is a disgrace. It is poor form, and it is a tax that every single country Victorian will be paying literally millions and millions and millions more to across country shires right throughout regional Victoria. This tax, in essence, is completely unfair.

The government, in its attempt to make this tax look agreeable, to try and get communities on board, has gone and falsely inserted the word ‘volunteers’ into its title. This bill does nothing of the sort. The state has an essential responsibility to fund and maintain emergency services right throughout country Victoria. For the time that we have had the CFA, the SES, ocean rescue, surf rescues and any number of other emergency service providers in our regions, the state has taken care and funded them.

Back in 2013 a decision was made to cut a tax that was levied against people who paid insurance and offset so everyone fairly contributed to funding emergency services. In this case it was the CFA services and fire services in the state of Victoria. This government, because it is broke, this government, because it cannot manage money, this government, because it is now endlessly at war with property owners, has decided to levy a big new tax and try and convince the people of regional Victoria it is going to help support their essential volunteer services. It is not. This tax will see the best part of an extra \$1 billion taxed against Victorians with only a portion of that going back to support volunteer services. It is a nonsense. It is an unfair tax.

In fact my community is telling me that, for an average CFA shed in a hardworking farming district, the collective increase in tax for the farmers that are volunteering for that brigade could have in fact replaced their old and decrepit CFA shed. They could have in fact replaced their 35-year-old CFA truck with the increase in tax that that community will be paying. Instead, this massive new tax – millions and millions of dollars that will be sent from regional Victoria – is in fact going back to Melbourne. It is paying for the metropolitan fire service, and not only that, it is going towards paying for government agencies, not volunteers. It is going to pay for Triple Zero Victoria. Triple Zero Victoria is an essential service that a responsible government should be funding and maintaining out of general revenue. It is going to fund Emergency Management Victoria – again, a service of bureaucrats that should be funded and managed and maintained by a responsible government from general revenue. It is going to fund Forest Fire Management Victoria – again, another government bureaucracy that should be being paid for out of general revenue by a responsible government, by a government that has not gone broke, by a government that has not wasted its money on overblown projects here in Melbourne and a government that is not allowing criminal behaviour on Big Build projects to blow budgets by billions. This is completely irresponsible management. Not only that, it is going to support, with massive increases, FRV, the metropolitan fire service. Again, those services are supposed to be being funded by a responsible state government. Instead, what do our hardworking volunteer brigades in regional Victoria get? What do hardworking surf lifesavers get? What do hardworking SES units get? Very, very little. With the amount extra just next year alone in the first tranche of the tax increase regional Victoria will be paying, or the state will be collecting, more than \$600 million extra in this next year. Beyond that, it continues to rise year in and year out until the state is receiving an extra \$1 billion on a tax that only started out at less than \$400 million when it was first brought in. These are massive increases to the tax, and people in rural and regional Victoria, people that belong to volunteer emergency service agencies, are not seeing a corresponding increase in their much needed and sought after funds and support that a responsible government should give.

For example, take the Corangamite shire: an extra \$4.5 million from the Corangamite shire ratepayers will be sucked from Corangamite, and I can assure you that the Corangamite shire will not see an extra \$4.5 million this year and an extra \$5 million the year following poured back into their emergency services. You know, the Port Campbell Surf Life Saving Club or the SES at Lismore or the SES down at Port Campbell or the SES in Colac or the SES in other parts of Polwarth – in Winchelsea and Lorne and Torquay and other places – none of these places will see the millions extra that have been sucked by this irresponsible government out of their communities getting poured back into those communities. Instead, the government is using the cover and the good nature and the strong reputation of our hardworking emergency service volunteers to massively increase a property tax. It is unfair, it is unjust and it is the hallmark of a government that has lost control of its finances and a government that is refusing to manage the general revenue of this state in a responsible and sustainable way.

So what are we left with? We are left with another lever this government is pulling that will put undue pressure on households in a cost-of-living crisis; it will make rental properties more expensive. Take, for example, just this tax alone combined with already skyrocketing land tax bills. In regional and rural Victoria this is adding massive dollars every week, week in, week out, to the cost of rental property. Now, rentals in parts of the Polwarth electorate, particularly those along the coastal areas, are already well above what most people can afford to pay for those that need to provide essential worker services, whether they are schoolteachers, childcare workers or working in the local hospitals in Apollo Bay or Lorne. In fact we are now going to have, on top of land tax, a massive increase in the fire services levy, which will make Victorian lives more expensive and cost-of-living pressures less sustainable, and it just goes on and on from this government. This government has fundamentally lost control of its budget to the extent that it is now using property and property ownership as its unbridled cash cow. It is inflicting more and more tax year in, year out. This measure of course is coming to us before the budget in another couple of months time, when we will undoubtedly expect to see even bigger increases.

Do you know what is really galling for so many people across the Polwarth electorate with this massive new price increase, this tax increase on their lives? It is that for some of the biggest multinational energy companies, the Minister for Climate Action, who is across the way on the table today, has overseen a massive fire service levy cut and land tax cut to these agencies. Take, for example, one of the richest families in the world, the people that own IKEA, investing in a massive wind farm on the edges of my electorate, and they get millions and millions of dollars cut to their rate and land tax and their fire services levy. How does this government justify that? How does this government say that to all the hardworking farmers and farming communities around wind farms, for example, who will be expected to come out and fight a fire and protect the assets of a multinational, some of the richest energy companies in the world? How do they look them in the eye and say, ‘You’re going to be paying millions more, community, but these guys from overseas, who take their profits overseas, we’re going to give them a massive discount.’ This is unfair, and it speaks to where this government’s priorities are.

They are not worried about the average ratepayer and the average taxpayer in regional Victoria. No, they are certainly not. They are happy to oversee crumbling roads, failing infrastructure and lack of investment in real CFA assets such as sheds, trucks and other equipment that many communities desperately need. In return the investment they are putting into regional Victoria is massive fire service and land tax discounts for multinational energy companies that this government has done its deals with. These are unfair deals. These are unfair tax increases. I do not support this bill.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (15:22): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. I will just speak a little bit about what this bill aims to do and what that might mean for the electorate of the Bellarine. This bill is about amending the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 to replace the fire services property levy with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund to enable it to fund a broad range of emergency services, and this is to reflect that broader purpose of the bill. The bill renames the principal act to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund Act 2012.

From 1 July 2025 this bill will make sure that Victoria’s hardworking emergency services – and I will just list who they are. That includes Fire Rescue Victoria; the Country Fire Authority, the CFA; Victoria State Emergency Service, VICSES; Triple Zero Victoria; Emergency Management Victoria; the State Control Centre; Forest Fire Management Victoria and our recovery agencies. This is to ensure that they have the resources they need to keep Victorians safe and help them recover.

This bill will do a couple of things. It will raise an additional \$750 million a year when fully implemented. It introduces an exemption from the levy for eligible CFA and VICSES volunteers and life members on their primary place of residence or on a farm of which they are an owner. It does provide the SES and CFA with an additional \$250 million support package for a rolling fleet replacement plan, volunteer training, a doubling of the volunteer and emergency services equipment

program – those VESEP grants, as they are known – and the modernisation of the Victoria Emergency app. With the opposition opposing this, they are blocking that \$250 million investment.

At the very heart of this, though, is the safety and resilience of our communities and the volunteers that are a part of those organisations. This includes the CFA and our State Emergency Service. These wonderful volunteers who dedicate their time are not just agencies or organisations, they actually are the lifeline for countless Victorians when we have a disaster in this state. Whether we are battling bushfires, responding to severe storms or saving lives in times of crisis, the emergency services, the CFA and the SES represent the best of our values of service, courage and commitment.

As beautiful as the Bellarine landscape is, it is also unpredictable. Each year we also face the threat of bushfires or grassfires to our livelihoods and our homes. The CFA, with its tens of thousands of dedicated volunteers and career firefighters, are our first line of defence. They stand ready day and night for when the pager might go off to turn out to a fire or an accident in our communities. They are experts in this fire prevention space as well, but it does not stop when the flames are out. They actually support our communities through that recovery as well and help families rebuild what may have been lost. They educate us on fire preparedness. Many of the CFA brigades on the Bellarine will often be at markets so they can educate and be available for information for our communities, and they actively work in that prevention space as well.

I have been very fortunate to be invited to many CFA stations across the Bellarine, but I had a real-life training experience with the Leopold fire brigade recently, who invited me to their training event. They kitted me all out in the gear – in a helmet and fire protection jacket and pants. They put me in the new tanker, and we were in a real-life training experience session. They put me in the new tanker that we have been able to support them to purchase under that VESEP grant, and I got to experience what the communication was like. They talked to each other about the job that they were going to, what roles each of the members was going to play and what was going to happen when they got to the incident. We then got to the incident, and I was instructed to go with a certain person. Then we grabbed a hose and we attempted to put out a fire in a shipping container, which was very much alight. I could hear the captain, Chris Wilkinson, behind me saying, ‘Advance. Go towards the fire.’ Of course our instant reaction is to go the other way. My heart started pumping pretty quickly, but it was an incredible experience. The hose was turned on, and that was quite an effort to stand my ground, to hold that hose and to put out that fire inside the shipping container. It was all very safely monitored as it was a training exercise, but it gave me a real appreciation of the work that they do and of the professionalism that they have in talking and communicating with each of their team members. It really did give me a great sense, so I want to thank the brigade and particularly the brigade captain Chris and his team for putting me through my paces. I thank them for all the work that they do.

While fire is one of the elements and challenges that we face, it is not the only one. We have been faced with storms more recently as well, floods and all these unexpected weather events, and the SES are also there for us. They turn up and are sometimes the first to turn up to incidents. When disaster strikes, the SES are often first on the scene and they do work really closely alongside the other emergency services. And they do it while we are tucked up in bed and feeling comfortable or watching the VicEmergency app. They are the ones out in these often harsh conditions making sure that we are safe and our communities can recover. We had some major storms last year in September and in February again this year – significant storms where the SES had to respond to multiple calls for assistance. They were addressing water damage and fallen trees, and they certainly are equipped and trained in a real professional sense to respond to those incidents. I thank them for the work they do as well.

Beyond this, the Bellarine SES unit are also actively engaged with their community. They promote that safety and preparedness for events. They conduct educational programs and participate in local events to raise awareness, and it is about preparing us as a community when we have an emergency. They have joined me at markets, and I have seen them out and about at various events as well highlighting the work that they do. I was really fortunate to have three women at the International

Women's Day event here in Parliament from the Bellarine SES unit – Nicole, Rachel and Emma were here – just to thank them and to acknowledge the work that they do in the SES unit. More and more women are joining the SES. It is a great organisation to be involved in, and they are very welcoming at the Bellarine SES unit. I am proud that this bill will support the Bellarine SES unit and the team's unwavering commitment to protecting lives and property.

Both the CFA and the SES are truly extraordinary in their volunteer hours and their dedication to our communities. They are from all walks of life, and they put service beyond self. They are our neighbours, they are our friends and they are our family members who give up their time and their comfort and often their own safety to protect others. We owe them more than just our gratitude; we owe them the resources and the training and the respect that they deserve. Whether it is ensuring their equipment is all up to date and they have adequate funding or just simply showing them appreciation, we must do all that we can to support these heroes who really do so much for us. I have several CFA brigades across the Bellarine and one SES unit. I just want to take this opportunity to thank them for all the work that they do and their commitment.

I want to stress that every dollar that is raised will go towards this vital life-saving equipment: the vehicles, the staff, the training of volunteers, community education and recovery support when Victorians need it most. We have invested heavily across the Bellarine. St Leonards has a new CFA station and, as I have talked about, Leopold has a new tanker. The VESEP grants have been incredible for our Drysdale CFA, Portarlington CFA, Bellarine SES, Queenscliff coastguard and lifesaving clubs across the Bellarine. We are a government who invest in our emergency services and we support our emergency services, because they support us when we need it the most.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (15:32): I have listened to this debate intently, both in my office and in the chamber today, and I have noticed the wringing of hands about support for the volunteers from those on the other side of the house. I would ask the rhetorical question of all the MPs on the other side of the house: where were you when your former Premier and Peter Marshall went to war with the CFA volunteers. You were hiding. You were nowhere to be seen sticking up for the volunteers. You did not stick up for the CFA when Daniel Andrews and Peter Marshall went to war with them. You did not stick up for the volunteers at all. You went to war with the volunteers. The only one that stuck up for the volunteers on the Labor Party side of the house was the late Jane Garrett when she was the minister. She actually stuck up for the volunteers. No-one else was there. No-one else was sticking up for the volunteers. The late Jane Garrett actually saw the merit in what the volunteers did and actually, to her credit, stuck up for those volunteers.

The union thuggery that we are talking about at the moment is not something new in recent times. If you go back to that time when the Labor Party was at war with the volunteers, Peter Marshall threatened to take an axe through Jane Garrett's head. That is union thuggery at its worst: a minister of the Crown being told that she would have an axe through her head for sticking up for the volunteers. All these crocodile tears on the other side about sticking up for the volunteers – where were you when it counted, because you were not there at all as you go through that. If the Labor Party genuinely cared about the volunteers, why have half the volunteers of the CFA actually left since that war went on? They resigned because they are just so disenchanted with the administration of the CFA, how it is structured now and how the CFA does not have its own dedicated staff anymore. If you are serious about the volunteers, why have they all left or why have half of them left? We on this side talk to the volunteers as well. There is no uniqueness about Labor Party MPs being the ones that speak to the volunteers. We speak to the volunteers in our electorates, and they are disenchanted. They are disenchanted with the administration of the CFA now.

Those on the other side have tried to rewrite history about the fire services levy. The member for Malvern, the former Treasurer, who was there when this levy was brought in, actually explained it very well: that previously the fire service was funded by a levy on the insurance industry. Only those that took out property insurance paid for the CFA and the MFB. So what was brought in was a system where all property owners paid, and that was about fairness and equity. But if we actually look at this

legislation, if you look at the legislation before the house that we are talking about today, there is no fairness and there is no equity, and it is not an emergency services tax, it is actually a tax to fund the bureaucracy of this state.

If you look at the amount of money that is being raised over the forwards, there is going to be \$2 billion in additional money raised. There is a lot being said from the other side of the house about how \$250 million of that is going to go to the CFA and the SES for trucks and equipment and buildings. That leaves \$1,750,000,000 unaccounted for as to what is going to happen into the future. It is going to go and fund core government businesses. It is going to fund Triple Zero Victoria. It is going to fund the State Control Centre. It is going to fund Emergency Recovery Victoria. If you talked to the people of Rochester after the floods, they would wonder why Emergency Recovery Victoria would be funded at all, let alone out of this particular levy. It is also going to fund Emergency Management Victoria. The people of Rochester would say the same thing about that organisation, because they were absolutely useless through the floods and afterwards. It is going to fund the emergency alert program to send out SMS messages to Victorians. Why isn't that core government business? Why do we have to have a new tax to actually pay for that? It is going to fund the emergency management operational communications program – core government business. Why do we need a great big new tax to fund that? It is going to fund Forest Fire Management Victoria. Why do we need a new tax to fund Forest Fire Management Victoria? That is a core business of government, not another new tax.

People in Victoria are the highest taxed of any state in Australia. Why do we need another new tax to pay for what is core government responsibility? It is a rhetorical question. The answer is: because the Labor Party cannot manage money and they are wasting all that tax that they collect, and so they are going to have another tax to actually make sure that happens. I think the real kicker in what is going to be funded out of this is the support functions within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Might I remind those on the other side of the house: do not get between the secretary of a department and a pot of money, because you will get knocked over in the rush. I am sure that the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action will make sure that he can get as much as possible out of this bucket of money to fund core business of government. Do not stand between the secretary and that pile of money, because those on the other side will get knocked over in the rush there.

So of that \$2 billion of extra tax that is going to be collected over the next three years, as I said, \$250 million goes to the CFA and to the SES for vehicles, for equipment, for sheds. Everyone supports that, but there is the capacity to do that within the existing budget without a new tax. But \$1,750,000,000 – that is nought, nought, nought, nought, nought –

Jade Benham: How many noughts?

Peter WALSH: a lot of noughts – is actually going to fund core government responsibility, and I think that is just totally wrong. I support the member for Brighton's reasoned amendment that this bill actually be withdrawn until the government genuinely consults with stakeholders about the rebate scheme and who is actually going to receive money out of this great big new tax. With the rebate scheme, fortunately, I think local government has actually done the right thing in saying to the government, 'We will not manage this rebate scheme for you. We will not put our heads on the chopping block to be your patsies to get all the criticism for this scheme, because it's going to be complicated. It's going to be very hard to do. People are going to be very unhappy.' They are going to have to apply to the State Revenue Office to get this back. We all know from our offices, from the people who are having trouble with land tax bills, how hard it is to actually get money back out of the SRO. There is only one thing worse than the secretary and a pot of money, and that is the State Revenue Office having to pay back some money, because they actually do not ever want to pay it back. That is not their role in life. To think that the State Revenue Office is going to be responsible for actually paying these rebates back to people. I think the volunteers who give up their time for the CFA or the SES actually need to know how they are going to get this money back. We do not want to have another piece of legislation where it is 'Pass it and trust us.' The reality is Victorians have lost trust in the Allan

Labor government. They do not trust the Allan government to manage the money they already take from us appropriately. They just see it disappear into the Big Build in Melbourne with over \$50 billion in cost overruns, so why should they trust the government that they will actually pay back this particular rebate?

I think this is just a tax to fund the bloated bureaucracy of the Allan Labor government, and it is wrong. It should not be in place. The things that it is going to fund are core responsibilities of government. We oppose this legislation.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (15:41): I am speaking of course on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025, and I do so, like the member for Murray Plains, having listened intently since the very beginning of this debate. I note that the lead speaker, the member for Brighton, just gave us 30 minutes of effectively insubstantial cliché with varying degrees of pitch, all of which was at 180 decibels, but it does not really add much to the debate. I am glad that the member for Sandringham is at the table, because I missed his mellifluous tones and his economic competence in that debate. I genuinely did always enjoy his contributions, and I do not wish to besmirch his future career.

But the opposition, I think, have been tying themselves in some knots in this debate with claims of wanting to support our SES volunteers but in their contributions undermining them, in effect, at every turn. I think it is important to be clear that opposing this bill deprives the SES and CFA volunteers, in my community and across Victoria, of essential new equipment. We are a growing state with a climate that is exerting an increasing impact on our communities, with the implication being that the call-out rates for SES volunteers and CFA volunteers across the state is growing. We need to support that.

The member for Murray Plains took us on a trip to history corner. I am going to join him there, but I am going to go a little bit further back, to 6 AD when the Emperor Augustus instituted what might be regarded as the first organised fire brigade in some recognisable form. His system involved slaves handing buckets to each other. This might be the opposition's alternative approach given their disdain for union members, but it was not an effective approach, because as we know about six decades later Rome burnt down. So the Julio-Claudians on the other side would be devastated with that approach because it would not work. We had a fairly rudimentary approach to fire prevention over the next 17 centuries. I am going to get to the contemporary era in due course, but cities burnt down regularly. We did not have an organised approach to fire prevention.

But there were a couple of events in the second half of the 17th century that moved things on a little. Firstly, the Hamburger Feuerkasse, the Hamburg fire office, in 1676 became the first officially established fire insurance company in the world. Also, in 1666 of course the Great Fire of London ravaged that city and led to a very significant reappraisal of the way in which fire and natural disaster was managed. It led to the institution of a system of fire insurance, but one that was incredibly piecemeal, one whereby individual property owners would acquire fire insurance and there were brigades which would then respond to fires, but they would only respond to fires at properties where there was some insignia depicting that that property was in fact insured. It was a system that was exposed very quickly as incredibly flawed. Rival brigades were running around London not actually putting out fires if they discovered that building had no insurance at all.

Edinburgh was the first jurisdiction, in the 1830s, to come up with a model of a municipal fire brigade that actually responded to fires irrespective of where they were. The reason this is all relevant is that this slow evolution towards a system of universal insurance and fire protection exemplifies what I think is a classic collective action problem. It is at the core of what we are talking about here today. We are all better off if we fund our emergency services properly and enable them to cope with the workload that the increasing incidence and severity of natural disasters is placing upon them.

There is an advantage to acting collectively, because it renders the entirety of our community safer. What we have been hearing from those opposite is that in effect they want that universal provision but

they are not prepared to fund it in a way that enables that service to be provided. That renders us all less safe. So what is the opposition approach? Is it to ration emergency services – some fires get a response, some do not? Is it to ration SES volunteers' capacity to respond to services – some traffic collisions will get an SES response, some will not? Or should we expect SES volunteers to continue to dip into their own pockets to buy essential equipment to get out there on the roads to keep our community safe and to respond to floods, car accidents, trees through roofs and the multitude of other scenarios that they are called to? I do not think they should be, and that is why I think this bill is important. Its primary purpose is of course to amend the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 and to replace the existing fire service property levy with an expanded emergency services and volunteers funding levy, which will ensure that every dollar raised goes towards vital life-saving equipment, vehicles, staff and training for volunteers. I have spoken to my local SES unit in Craigieburn at length about this, and that is what they told me in no uncertain terms they want to see.

I am here representing them today, because I know that over the last number of years their call-out rate has doubled from what it was a decade ago. Between 2009 and 2013 the call-outs across the state in absolute terms were about 20,000 a year for the SES. Over the last three years they have averaged 35,000. There are a number of factors that play into that. There are the vagaries of climate that I touched on before, but I would also suggest that Melbourne is encroaching into newer areas where they have got a higher incidence of grassfires, like in your community as well, Acting Speaker De Martino. Trees have a tendency to fall on roads and onto people's gardens and houses. All of that generates a high call-out rate, particularly when you have got an increasing incidence of storms and a higher intensity of storms when those storms do occur. I think that in response to this increased workload, which is shouldered by extraordinary volunteers, we need to ensure that volunteers do not have to then worry about raising funds so that they can focus on what they love doing most, and that is – what they tell me at least – helping and serving the community when they need it most.

I want to particularly acknowledge Omar Sayegh and Harminder Singh, who are the controller and deputy controller at the Craigieburn unit, for their impassioned advocacy to me and other colleagues in Melbourne's north who are in that area that the Craigieburn SES unit serves, for explaining in really vivid terms the pressures that they have been under as a consequence of the previous funding regime and what this new package of reforms will mean in a very practical way for their capacity to serve our community. I was at the Craigieburn unit awards evening the very day that the Treasurer in the other place – at that time I believe she was the Minister for Emergency Services, if the chronology is right – made the announcement about this new package of reforms. It was incredibly inspiring and quite moving to hear the impact of that higher rate of call-outs that the Craigieburn SES unit has been subject to on the emotional wellbeing and on the physical wellbeing of the volunteers. I keep coming back to the word 'volunteers', because these are people who do dedicate themselves and their time to the service of our community. During that awards dinner in fact there was a call-out that necessitated about half the room rushing out. Without a second thought, a second glance or a second word they were out the door, going to someone in distress at Mcivor lake, I think, down in Roxburgh Park. The evening that was there to celebrate them was itself interrupted by their service to community. On that evening there were a number of people who were recognised with life membership of the Craigieburn SES, and I do want to acknowledge them now: Kevin O'Callaghan and Anne O'Callaghan, Alan Penaluna, Paul Ledwich, Emily Ledwich, Wayne Jordan and Maree Jordan. They have given decades, if not in fact cumulatively centuries, worth of service to the Craigieburn SES unit since it was established in the early 1980s, having been previously the civil defence unit in the area.

This \$250 million package that will go the SES, in part in my area, will make a difference. I want to thank each and every one of the members of the Craigieburn SES unit for advocating to me and for advocating to the Premier, the relevant ministers and the Treasurer to ensure that they have the tools they need to make timely responses in a way that does not necessitate them dipping into their own pockets and placing themselves in more jeopardy than they need to be in.

I want to go back, in the very brief time remaining to me, and revisit the start of the fire services levy, which we know came out of Black Saturday and the royal commission in its aftermath. The impact of those fires was writ large across many of our communities – I know in your own, Acting Speaker De Martino. I speak often with my in-laws whose lives perhaps were saved only by the change of wind that took that fire bearing down towards Healesville up, very sadly, towards Marysville, and we know the impact of what happened there. The royal commission in its aftermath revealed a sort of patchwork and inefficient system of funding services. It was Premier Baillieu and the member for Rowville indeed – I am not sure if he has made a contribution yet, but I would be very interested to hear it – who brought in a system to replace that piecemeal and inefficient system of financing our fire services across the state, and that is what we are doing with this. We are expanding the fiscal base to enable emergency services across the board to be more sustainable. When it was done 12 years ago the member for Rowville said it was the most important reform of state taxes in decades. Now apparently the sky is falling in. I suggest it is not. I suggest it is going to put our SES on a firmer footing. I commend the bill to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (15:51): I rise to make my contribution on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025, otherwise known as this Labor government's 61st new tax on hardworking Victorians in a cost-of-living crisis. At the outset, I would like to take the opportunity to recognise our amazing emergency services personnel for their incredible services in my electorate. There are 10 CFA fire brigades and one SES unit who turn out constantly to keep people in my community safe. We saw no better example of that than last weekend with a significant bushfire in Montrose. The Montrose CFA fire brigade and more than 30 other CFA brigades from the broader region turned out to fight that fire and protect our community. I acknowledge their bravery and courage and thank them for their commitment and dedication to our community.

Let us be clear, though, from the start: this bill represents nothing more than another new massive tax on all Victorians. As I said, this is the 61st increased or new tax under this Labor government. What a disgraceful record of this Labor government – a broken promise of this Labor government. They cannot manage money, and Victorians are paying the price. What is even worse is that this tax will not only cost Victorians more, it is also going to discriminate against Victorians, especially people who live in regional Victoria, including the Yarra Valley region and my electorate. Farmers who produce the food that we eat and agribusinesses like wineries, distilleries, flower growers and plant nurseries and manufacturers will all suffer massively under this new tax.

It was no surprise that on the same day that this massive new discriminatory tax was announced the 2024–25 budget update was handed down, which revealed net debt was growing by \$59.6 million a day and had increased by almost \$11 billion over the previous six months. Clearly under Labor the budget is bleeding money. There is a mammoth budget black hole, and the government is looking to tax Victorians more to try and fix it. So how did the government respond to their brutal budget update of soaring debt? Well, just a week before Christmas, this government decided it would impose a \$2.1 billion massive new tax on Victorians by increasing the fire services property levy – some Christmas gift – making Victorians suffer more as a result of Labor's financial incompetence.

Let us go back to 2010 when this fire services levy was first proposed. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommended that the then fire services levy be replaced with a property-based levy. At that time Victorians were paying a fire services duty through their insurance premiums to big insurance companies. The insurance companies at the time were required to contribute to funding our fire services and in turn would recoup their contributions by imposing a duty on insurance premiums for building and contents insurance. The royal commission criticised the duty on the basis that it lacked equity and transparency, and the royal commission argued that it was not clear whether insurance companies were actually making a windfall from the levy or whether they were passing on all of the funds they raised. It was also found to be unfair because those who were not insured would still receive the same level of fire protection as those that carried appropriate insurance cover and paid more. The

royal commission argued a fire services levy based on property value would be a more equitable proposal, and it was left up to a Liberal government to make this important reform and remove this inequity and lack of transparency and introduce a fairer and more equitable levy for Victorians. It meant a fairer system that delivered a \$100 million saving to Victorian families. I note the Labor Party opposed this reform at the time. Twenty-five years later we see this tired Allan Labor government come full circle. Labor, this Labor government, wants to move a new system that brings back the inequity and lack of transparency that the royal commission condemned. It is clear the Allan Labor government does not care about the inequity and lack of transparency or fairness, and all they care about is taxing Victorians more.

The Allan Labor government is introducing this new tax under the guise of supporting volunteer services like the CFA and SES with more funding, but that is just disingenuous, because it will actually impose a bigger tax burden on Victorians to channel more money to prop up Labor's bureaucracy and back office for core government essential services that were never previously funded by a levy. These services were always funded through consolidated revenue. The budget is now so broke that the Allan Labor government is now forcing Victorians to pay more tax for core government services, and it is clear that this massive new tax will not be quarantined for CFA and SES volunteers. In fact the government conceded that mostly it will fund Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria, most of it to the public service back office and not frontline services. This comes after the Labor government ripped \$38 million in funding from Triple Zero. Labor rips money out of Triple Zero's budget, then plugs that hole by making Victorians pay a bigger tax. What an absolute disgrace.

I have long advocated for increased funding for Victoria State Emergency Service, including the Lilydale SES in my electorate. We should value our SES volunteers more, not less, and ensure adequate funding for capital and operating expenses. I know that this Labor government will try and tell the SES volunteers that this legislation will deliver them more funds, but it will not, and the question of sustainable funding for the SES is not answered by this legislation. I have spoken directly to many of the volunteers at the Lilydale SES, who have told me firsthand that they need to put their hand in their own pocket to fund maintenance on equipment and vehicles, even to fill the SES trucks with petrol. It is absolutely outrageous given the tremendous service they do for our community in times of storms and other emergencies. I thank them for their efforts given the many storm events in our community.

Lest there be any doubt, I have no objection to the SES being in receipt of more funds raised from this levy, but the SES will be denied their fair share because the majority of the tax collected will instead now be funding core government services and back office bureaucracy. When we asked in the bill briefing for information about how revenue collected will be split between the SES, the CFA and the government bureaucracies listed, the government failed to answer. What is more, the government tried to say the CFA and SES volunteers are exempt from this tax, but in some twisted way they will still be forced to pay up-front. Our dedicated and hardworking volunteers will be forced to pay up-front and then sometime later be required to go to the State Revenue Office, get a form, fill it out and hope they get paid back, hope they get reimbursed. I mean, how crazy is that situation? Volunteers are exempt but still have to pay and hope they get reimbursed later in a cost-of-living crisis. This is just punishing community – our community heroes, our volunteers – for this bungled legislation by the Labor government.

Furthermore, one of the harshest aspects of this bill is how hard it will hit our primary producers. In my electorate across the Yarra Valley I am fortunate to be surrounded by some of the greatest vineyards and fruit and vegetable growers in the world – cherries, apples, tomatoes and brussels sprouts as well as flower and plant growers. These producers are huge contributors to our economy. They employ thousands of people, export domestically and all over the world and put food on our table. Yet because these primary producers occupy thousands of acres of land to produce and grow these amazing products, they will be hardest hit under this massive unfair tax. Under Labor primary

producers will face a tax increase of more than 189 per cent. It is a complete outrage and completely discriminatory. What Labor have forgotten is that these farmers are already required to have significant firefighting capacity, and they maintain massive stores of water and pumping capacity to meet the demands of firefighting units. Often they are volunteers too. But Labor wants our farmers to pay the highest rate of tax under this new levy, and it is nothing more than a de facto land tax on Victorian farmers. Also, the massive new tax will force some of our small and medium manufacturers to pay between 64 and 100 per cent more, and this means Victoria's manufacturers will suffer even more under this government, impacting their ability to employ more people like apprentices, and potentially making them move their operations out of Victoria altogether because the cost of doing business in Victoria has now become so prohibitive.

Local councils have objected to this new tax too, given there was no consultation with any of the 79 councils across Victoria and given the cost-of-living crisis. The Yarra Ranges council in my electorate were not consulted and have informed me that this new tax grab will likely cost Yarra Ranges residents \$10 million more. We oppose this tax because it is unfair. It is unfair because this government is seeking to penalise Victorians for the reckless spending and sheer financial incompetence under this Labor government. It is not fair that farmers and manufacturers will be facing a doubling of their tax bill, and it is not fair that volunteers, supposedly exempt, will still have to pay this tax up-front. This massive new tax proves Labor has run out of money and will continue taxing Victorians more.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (16:01): I rise to speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. It is a vital step forward in ensuring Victoria's emergency services have the resources they need to continue protecting our communities. Before I start, I do want to mention the SES volunteers in my local area. We have units in Inverloch, Wonthaggi, San Remo, Phillip Island and soon Clyde, and we have neighbouring units in Pakenham, Cranbourne and Hastings who are always ready to respond. They are out there day and night turning up to incidents, braving wild, woolly weather and providing support to other emergency services, whether that be the CFA, Ambulance Victoria, Life Saving Victoria or police. We see them out on the roads, on top of roofs, at fires and at so many other emergencies, and their visible presence at markets, schools, festivals and community events just shows their community spirit, dedication and how welcoming and approachable and amazing they are all around.

It was probably this time last year, or over the last couple of years, that the impassioned advocacy of my SES units led us to look at an emergency services levy beyond the fire services levy, to capture them in that program, as per other jurisdictions, and this has come to fruition with this bill. I was speaking with one of my unit managers – we have heard this being debated in the chamber today – about the things that they have to pay for. They do get a protective initial uniform, but anything else they have to pay for themselves, including equipment, repairs around the unit, fundraising, merchandise and fire equipment. When they do extinguisher checks, they can be up to \$800. Security systems – the SES do part pay the unit, but they have to make up the rest. And of course there are the unit vehicles as well. They are having to apply for council grants for chainsaws and, as we have heard, having to pay for their own fuel.

In this bill we have announced a \$250 million funding package to support our dedicated emergency services organisations and volunteers, and key investments in this package include increased operational funding for VICSES units and CFA brigades, investment in rolling fleet upgrades for both organisations; a doubling of the Victorian volunteer emergency services equipment program, VESEP; and funding for training and technology enhancements to better equip our volunteers in their life-saving roles. This change will align us with funding models in other states, as I have previously mentioned. The \$250 million package, for example, includes \$70 million for fleet replacement programs for our VICSES and CFA and \$62 million to expand VESEP, allowing more volunteers to access vital vehicles, equipment and station upgrades. We were very pleased at our local CFA Pound Creek – we got electric battery-operated tools, which was very exciting because it is really hard to run

a lead when you are out there on the ground. There is \$29 million for additional training helping VICSES volunteers gain the skills and support necessary for their critical work, and \$53 million for a full modernisation of the VicEmergency app, improving communications for all Victorians by allowing users to translate the app into their preferred language.

As a sign of appreciation for the hard work of our SES volunteers and CFA volunteers, we will also provide an exemption for eligible active volunteers and life members on their principal place of residence. Speaking with a lot of my brigades and units, it is something they are very, very happy about. I think they would like us to go further and have an exemption on drivers registration, rego, as well, but we will put that one aside. Understanding the challenges climate change poses to our farmers, we are offering these volunteers the choice to apply the exemption to either their home or their farm, ensuring they are supported in their crucial roles both as emergency responders and as essential contributors to our agricultural industry.

This bill delivers on that commitment by amending the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 and replacing the fire services property levy (FSPL) with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF) levy. This important reform will create a fairer, more sustainable way to fund not only the fire services but, as I have mentioned, a broader range of emergency response and recovery efforts. Reflecting this expanded focus, the principal act will be renamed the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund Act 2012. Beginning 1 July 2025, this change will provide stable and secure funding for Fire Rescue Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, the SES, Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, the State Control Centre, Forest Fire Management Victoria and our essential recovery agencies. These organisations do extraordinary work responding to natural disasters and supporting communities as they rebuild. This bill will ensure they have the tools, training and resources they need to keep Victorians safe.

From 1 July 2025 the fund will provide up to 95 per cent of the annual budgets for SES, Triple Zero and all the other agencies that I have mentioned. These agencies work alongside our fire services to respond to floods, storms and other emergencies, helping to keep communities safe and ensuring rapid recovery. The flexible funding model also allows for adjustments when necessary, ensuring the right level of support is always in place. In addition, it introduces greater flexibility in funding for our fire services. Currently the FSPL provides a fixed percentage of funding for CFA and FRV. From 1 July 2025 the new fund will allow for more adaptable funding, covering up to 95 per cent of the CFA's budget and up to 87.5 per cent of FRV's budget. This means our emergency services will have the funding structure that meets their evolving needs, ensuring that they are well equipped and fully prepared to serve Victorians.

We know our emergency services volunteers are the heart and soul of our emergency response. They give their time, their expertise and their energy to protect our communities, and this bill recognises their incredible contribution. How this will work is the Treasurer, in consultation with the Minister for Emergency Services, will define the specific eligibility criteria for volunteers through a notice published in the *Government Gazette*. Additionally, they will have the authority to designate further emergency volunteer-based organisations whose members can access this offset. To ensure fairness, the maximum offsets for farmland will be capped based on a specified land value as determined by the Treasurer. This approach guarantees that the offset remains dedicated to supporting our hardworking volunteers while maintaining the integrity of the ESVF and preventing unintended misuse.

The government acknowledges that the bill introduces a significant change in how local government collection agencies administer the levy, and to ease the administrative workload on councils a designated entity appointed by the Treasurer through a notice in the *Government Gazette* will administer the offset scheme. This responsible entity is expected to be a state government public service body with statutory responsibilities. The State Revenue Office will also improve sharing of principal-place-of-residence status data, with councils to simplify administration while maintaining strict privacy protections.

We cannot ignore the reality that fires, floods and storms are becoming more frequent and more severe. The impact of these disasters can last for years, affecting families, businesses and entire communities. That is why this bill is not just about funding; it is about futureproofing Victoria's emergency services, ensuring they have the resources they need not just to respond but to recover, rebuild and strengthen our resilience for years to come. It establishes a strong and sustainable funding model to support emergency services well into the future. This is an investment in the safety and security of every Victorian to ensure that no community is left behind when disaster strikes. And it reinforces our commitments to the people who put their lives on the line for us – our firefighters, our SES volunteers, 000 call takers and emergency managers – by giving them the resources they need to continue their life-saving work. I commend the bill to the house.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (16:10): I would also like to speak today on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. I would like to state at the outset that the Victorian Greens absolutely support ensuring that our emergency services workers, whether they are professional – paid – or volunteer, who go out and respond to disasters on our behalf are adequately resourced to do their vital work. They do incredible work, they do important work. Just to give a local example – a lot of people in this place have given local examples – following the 2022 floods that affected my community in Kensington I saw the excellent work of our local SES up close. After that I went and visited our local SES, which is actually located in Footscray, and I learned about the lack of facilities there and the impact that was having on volunteers. I campaigned alongside those volunteers for the next few months for better facilities for them. They had gone for years begging and begging to upgrade their facilities. They did not even have internet and a phone signal in their facilities in Footscray, which was really hampering their ability to do their important work. After my visit and that community campaign, they magically did then get their money for planning for a new unit. Sometimes it is funny how change can happen. I would like to thank all the volunteers in my electorate but also across Victoria as well as the paid and professional emergency services workers who get up day in, day out and respond to emergencies for all of us.

We know, as many people have canvassed in this debate, that extreme weather events and climate disasters are becoming worse. We are all feeling this. None of us have been able to escape it. We have just sweltered through the hottest summer on record. Last week we had another heatwave in Victoria. I do not know about anyone else in this place, but the heat in my house – upstairs is not air-conditioned – was absolutely stifling. We have people in public housing in my electorate who, when there is a heatwave, are forced to sleep on the oval at the local park because the conditions in their flats are literally like an oven. It is terrible for people's health. It costs people their lives; heatwaves cost more lives than any other natural disaster in Australia. People are having to choose between sweltering through these impacts of extreme heat or paying through the nose to run their air conditioning if they have it at all. We are, unfortunately, woefully underprepared to cope with more of these heatwaves in future. Of course we all watched as Cyclone Alfred wrought havoc on our friends and family in northern New South Wales and south-east Queensland the week before last, causing billions of dollars of damage, and this is a really scary new normal. Make no mistake, these events are being made worse by climate change, which is caused by burning coal, gas and oil.

You would think in the face of these climate disasters, given how serious and terrifying and costly they are, that we would have governments falling over themselves to deal with the root causes of climate change, but what do we have instead? Instead we have Labor governments, both state and federal, not only continuing to allow coal and gas projects to be built but expanding coal and gas burning and drilling, making the climate crisis worse and leading to more extreme and more frequent climate disasters. Federally, Labor has approved more than 30 new coal and gas projects since coming to power, and the federal Labor government has pushed setting the 2035 climate targets back until after the next election. And here in Victoria we saw the state Labor government approve gas drilling just last year on Gunditjmara sea country near the Twelve Apostles, and then Premier Allan, the Labor Premier, promised to fast-track even more gas drilling than this. Victoria's coal plants are approved to

continue burning well into the 2030s, against all the scientific evidence. This is absolutely disastrous for our climate.

On top of this, Victoria is not even on track to meet our emissions reduction targets. Infrastructure Victoria just last week reported that Victoria is not delivering large-scale renewable generation projects fast enough, and we do not even have emissions data for Victoria for the last two years. The latest data we have, from 2022, is that in Victoria our emissions went up by 5 per cent, and a lot of this is due to the inaction on our fastest growing source of emissions, transport.

Members interjecting.

Ellen SANDELL: I can hear some interjections from Labor members opposite, saying, ‘Why aren’t you talking about the bill?’ This bill is about climate disasters and how we refer to them, and if Labor does not understand that climate change is making these disasters worse then we have got a real problem.

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I believe that the member for Melbourne has strayed significantly from talking about our essential services and the bill before the house, and I ask you to bring her back.

Jess Wilson: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, dare I defend the Greens, but this bill does actually speak to the reason why it is being put in place – the government claims it is because of worsening natural disasters – so I think the member on her feet is being relevant to the bill.

Ellen SANDELL: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, there are some opposite who might be a little upset that they are actually not the leader of their party, but the leader of a party actually is afforded larger scope in debating bills than just the bill itself.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): I will rule on the point of order. Previous speakers have raised the issue of climate change in connection with the bill, but I do ask the member on her feet to draw her comments back to the substance of the bill at hand.

Ellen SANDELL: I have talked a bit about climate change and how bad it is, because this bill is about funding for climate disaster response, and the reason I am raising these issues is because we do not just need ambulances at the bottom of the cliff, we actually need to be doing more to prevent worsening climate disasters from happening. Instead, we have a Labor government here who has cancelled many of the programs designed to help households reduce emissions. Labor has cancelled the home battery cashback scheme. Solar rebates have been reduced. Labor has cancelled the community climate change adaptation program after just one year. They have cancelled the home heating and cooling upgrades program for low-income households. All of these programs are designed to reduce emissions and then go on to reduce climate disaster severity. We have also heard evidence during the parliamentary inquiry into climate resilience and the built environment just recently on how underprepared our built environment is to deal with these extreme weather events. Whether that is heatwaves or flash flooding from big rain events, storms, rising sea levels or riverine flooding, these are all events that the SES and our emergency services need to respond to.

One thing that came up during that inquiry and the submissions was that our stormwater systems cannot cope with the increase in rain being dumped all at once in our communities. Yet there is no funding for councils to update those stormwater systems, so then we are getting more floods and we are getting more severe floods that the SES has to respond to. People are sweltering in buildings that hit 50 degrees inside during a heatwave, and yet mandatory energy efficiency standards for rentals still have not been implemented here in Victoria. What prompted this inquiry in the Parliament in the first place, which the Greens moved, was that the Victorian government, to their credit, have developed some really good climate change adaptation plans that talk about the risk to Victoria’s built environment when it comes to climate change – they are good reports that list all of the risks to Victoria, and they are well researched – but when it comes to the actions at the end of the document,

it is very scant. There are very few real solutions being put on the table to deal with these big structural issues that are having and will continue to have such a profound impact on our lives, on our health and on our safety. Stakeholders do tell us that other states do this better. We are being told that New South Wales has a more comprehensive climate risk register than Victoria has. So why is Victoria so much further behind?

Again, a local example where this – and this bill in particular – is very relevant is Kensington Banks in my electorate. It is just one example of huge government failure significantly affecting people's lives. This is an estate, Kensington Banks, that was built just 25 years ago supposedly to withstand the 1 per cent annual exceedance probability flood risk. Thousands of residents bought and moved into their homes after being explicitly told by Melbourne Water that they were above the 1 per cent flood risk level. People made huge financial and life decisions based on this information, some of them just a year ago. Then last year the government essentially admitted that they got it wrong, that the estate actually was flood prone after all – 'Sorry, everyone.' Now they have to live with years of uncertainty, worry, anxiety, plummeting house prices and skyrocketing insurance premiums, which my community is now facing. So people are asking the question: what will the government do about this, given that it was a government failure that led to this problem that all residents now live with and pay for? Well, residents are being told, 'You can wait 18 months for the results of a study into what the options might be, and then once we know what the options are after 18 months we will wait to see if the government will fund those flood mitigation options.' All the while, in the short term or the medium term, the government has not committed anything to support residents, so residents are just out on their own. This is not even to mention the residents whose homes were flooded in 2022 in places like Rochester or Maribyrnong and other parts of our state. Where other state governments have set up funds after floods and applied successfully for federal money to help households retrofit their homes to deal with flood risk, Victoria has left people on their own, ruling out any government help.

Coming back to this bill, who pays for all of this? Victorians do. Climate disasters cost us. They cost lives, they cost health and they cost billions and billions of dollars to clean up and for communities to recover from. Who pays? Communities across Victoria do, in rebuild costs, in lost wages and productivity, in skyrocketing insurance premiums, in displacement and all the stress that comes with that, in lives lost and significant health costs and in the destruction of all the beautiful natural places that our communities hold dear.

The Greens have some concerns with Victorians paying increasingly more to cover the costs of dealing with extreme weather events, which are exacerbated by increasing climate change, without the government doing more to mitigate them and prevent them from happening in the first place. We have some concerns with Victorians paying more to clean up climate disasters, while Labor continues to pour fuel on the fire by expanding gas drilling and continuing to burn coal and other fossil fuels. We have some concerns about these costs and the burden of administration falling on councils, which the Labor state government has rate capped and constrained in their ability to fund the services their communities need, and all the while the state government loves to blame councils whenever something goes wrong. We have concerns with our emergency services not necessarily having the equipment they need to do their work, such as recent reports of ageing fire trucks not being replaced at the end of their life, but this fund may not necessarily go to fixing that.

It is vitally important that emergency services are properly funded to respond to extreme weather events, but it is also not good enough just to respond or clean up after disasters have happened. We need to also invest in preventing future climate disasters from getting worse, at the very least doing what we can to prepare community for the climate change that is already locked into the system. If Labor was serious about relieving the burden on emergency services and on our volunteers, they would be doing everything they could to wean us off coal and gas, not approving gas drilling.

Members interjecting.

Ellen SANDELL: The Labor members on the other side are saying they are, but they are literally approving new gas drilling and cutting climate programs, as I have announced in my speech. We do not just need ambulances at the bottom of the cliff. We need to do everything we can to prevent disasters from happening and give communities the support to prepare them and lessen the impact on them when it does happen.

These are all the factors that we will be considering when we consider our position on this bill. There is a lot to wade through here. There are a lot more discussions to be had and a lot more stakeholders to talk to. It is a very serious decision to make, and because of that and because of all these different factors that we need to consider, the Greens will be abstaining from this bill in the lower house while we consider our position in the upper house. We very much hope that Labor comes to the table, in this upcoming budget in particular, with significantly more support for climate mitigation and preparedness to protect us and to protect all of our communities from the climate change that is already happening and the future climate disasters that are to come.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (16:25): I proudly rise today to speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. This is a fundamentally important bill, and it is necessary for the safety of all Victorians in the face of a changing climate and the related disasters that are accompanying it. I know only too well the impact that changing climate has on my constituency in Monbulk. It is a beautiful place to live. But when that wind picks up it is terrifying, and on dry days when fires start it is beyond terrifying.

It is pleasing to hear that the Greens will be supporting this bill, and it is fundamentally disappointing that the opposition will not. I would like to pick up on the member for Melbourne's point almost chastising us when it comes to our record on climate change. I feel obligated to defend our track record here, because no other jurisdiction in this country has done more than Victoria to address net zero. We actually brought forward net zero from 2050 to 2045 because we are tracking so well in this regard, and it would be really nice to one day have some acknowledgement from the Greens on this. I do appreciate their sincerity, though, in their concern at climate change. I have stated here categorically that I consider the most existential crisis that we are facing is a changing climate for each and every person in Victoria, in this country and on the planet. I sincerely want to make sure that our track record here is acknowledged as well as the incredible work done by the Minister for Climate Action.

Before I go into the bill in detail, I would like to acknowledge the incredible emergency services volunteers and employees from the CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria and Fire Rescue Victoria, along with Victoria Police, who worked incredibly hard over the weekend to fight the fires that occurred in Montrose and Kilsyth. They are still putting out those fires. The fires are still burning. They are contained. It is considered safe. The latest emergency alert came out about 20 minutes ago assuring residents that it will not break the containment lines, and that is comfort for everyone. But the reason it will not break containment lines is because of the work of these people – of our volunteers and of the employees who are there, who turn out in the middle of the night and who are there every moment that we need them. I am so grateful to them, as I know the people of Monbulk are.

In terms of technicalities of where it started, it actually started in the electorate of Monbulk and jumped into the electorate of Evelyn, because it does not acknowledge electoral boundaries, funny enough, a fire; it goes where it wants to. But there was a moment of sheer terror for people when they thought, 'If this goes up the mountain, this will be terrible,' because fire likes to burn uphill rapidly, and it was right at the base of Mount Dandenong. I cannot state again how incredibly grateful all of us are for the work that they did. There was property loss, and that is awful for those who are affected. I mentioned in my members statement the other day that my cousin's backyard was burnt to a crisp and the fire – I have seen the footage – came to within a metre of the gas hot water system attached to the back of the house. That is terrifying for anyone. They were really lucky. The house in the end was left untouched. They got out there themselves working on it.

This fire right in a peri-urban area is a stark reminder to all of us who live anywhere in bushland to, please, have an emergency plan ready to go, be it for fire or be it for storms or if you live in flood areas. You should have an emergency plan knowing what to do. Having a plan is the best thing you can do to arm yourself with a pathway out that is safe for you and your family, and I really want to take this opportunity to stress that. It is a timely reminder to all of us.

The heat and the dry fuel on Saturday created really good conditions for that fire, I have to say, and we are so lucky that the rain came. But over 100 firefighters turned up. We had helicopters there. We had bulldozers there. I cannot even recall the number of trucks – I think it was 40 vehicles deployed to fight it. The swift response is testament to our agencies, and that is why this bill is fundamentally critical, because it is there to ensure that they are adequately funded and resourced.

Our firefighters in addition to the SES give up so much of their time – and now I will talk about our volunteers. I feel very passionate about our volunteers, and I did take a bit of umbrage with the member for Murray Plains chastising us once again. Of course we value them. I have 20 CFA brigades across Monbulk. I have the busiest SES in the state – 1820 call-outs in a year – and our unit controller there Ben Owen and our deputy unit controller Olinka Edwards are legends. They are absolute heroes. Every single person that dons that uniform there at the SES and every single fireperson – operational or non-operational, it does not matter – who turns up to support their community, they are the best of us, and so my sincere thanks goes to them.

That is why I find it galling that those opposite cannot back in this bill. How on earth can we fund the increasing number of call-outs across SES, across the CFA and with the changing climate, which many over there I suspect secretly continue to deny is anthropogenic? They will not say it out loud anymore now, because they know that they have lost the public on this one, but it seems to underpin some of the issues that emanate from them. With a changing climate we will need more resources. Every time a truck goes out parts wear out, so the more often it is put out the sooner it needs to be replaced. How do we magic that into existence without gathering more resources through funding to do so?

It is cuckoo fairytale la-la land to think that we do not need to raise more revenue in order to be able to fund the needs that are already very apparent. The term ‘unprecedented’ when it comes to storms is now gone. It is a historical term. Actually in terms of history, I have to give the member for Greenvale a shout-out for his treatise on fire safety and the evolution of universal fire coverage. It is a pity for the people in the LA fires that they do not have a system like we do in Victoria, because they were there trying to get private firefighters. And if you can pay for a private firefighter, they are not going to help your neighbour out. They are there employed to help out with your house and your house only. That is an appalling situation. Thank heavens we live here. Thank heavens we have a system here where the fires turn up irrespective of whether or not you can pay for them. And here is the beauty: we do not have to pay for them when they come for a call-out.

Do you know how often our volunteers are asked by people they go and attend to, ‘How much do I owe you?’ When the SES turn up and they chop down the trees that are blocking someone from being able to leave their driveway or they bring the tarps to stop the water pouring into their house they are often asked, ‘What do I owe you?’ And their response, proudly, is ‘Not a penny. We’re volunteers. We do this for you.’ But the funds come from somewhere; they come from all of us. That is the collective good of paying taxes. I know that is anathema sometimes to those opposite, but at the end of the day if we want to live in a society where we take care of each other – a thriving, healthy, functioning society – we all need to contribute to it, and that is why I really am so utterly, utterly disappointed and verging on furious with those opposite saying that we should not all somehow contribute to this.

You know what, the fact that volunteers will be exempt from paying this is a wonderful initiative, and I note it is not one that they came up with when they brought in the fire services levy. It was us who came up with that. So to be lectured by them that they seem to somehow know better about volunteers and that we cannot speak about them is beyond disingenuous. My blood is boiling at this point in time,

as I am sure you can all see, because of the vulnerability of all of us across the state, but nowhere probably more so than in my area, which happens to have had the second-highest number of climate-related disasters since 2006 in the country, in the Yarra Ranges LGA, which covers the majority of the area of Monbulk electorate.

We are staring into the face of a world that is increasingly hostile to us. We cannot turn the wind off and we cannot stop the trees from falling, but we can support every volunteer who turns out to help us when they do. I extend my sincerest thanks to them. It is because of them that I sleep better at night. It is because of them that all the people of Monbulk sleep better at night. And do we need to fund them better? Yes, we do. That is exactly what this bill does, and I commend it to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (16:35): I rise to speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. Another day, another big tax from the Allan Labor government. A day does not go by in this place when we are not debating some form of legislation on crime that does nothing to address crime in this state, we are not debating some piece of legislation that has something to do with housing yet nothing to actually increase the supply of housing in this state or improve affordability or we are not debating another tax on Victorians. The Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, the tax that this government is putting in place, is simply another big tax on Victorian taxpayers, because this government cannot manage money, and Victorians are paying the price.

This piece of legislation replaces the fire services property levy, which previously funded both the CFA and the FRV, and the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund will now fund a raft of organisations and emergency services, including the CFA and the FRV, Victorian State Emergency Service, Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, the Department of Justice and Community Safety in relation to emergency management and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action for forest fire management. Before this bill was introduced, all of these emergency services, other than the CFA and FRV, were funded through consolidated revenue in this state, through the taxes that were already being collected by this government from Victoria. But because this government has managed Victoria's books so poorly, because debt is soaring towards \$188 billion, with the interest repayments set to reach \$1 million a day in the coming years, this government now has to slug Victorians with a big new tax to fund the very services that it should be and has been funding from consolidated revenue.

If we go back to the history of the fire services property levy and how it came about, I was speaking to the former Treasurer the member for Malvern about how it was put in place at the time. In what was a true piece of tax reform legislation, it did replace stamp duties that existed on insurance. It was a recommendation that came out of the royal commission to make sure that every Victorian was paying their fair share when it came to the management of our emergency services and our fire services here in Victoria. The then Treasurer the member for Rowville did an exemplary job when it came to actually undertaking tax reform in this state, because when the former Treasurer put in place the fire services property levy, what did it do? It actually reduced the tax take by \$100 million per year. It cost Victorians less when that levy was put in place and stamp duties were taken off insurance products. What did that mean in a real way? It meant that rural and regional Victorians paid \$120 less on average a year and metropolitan homeowners paid \$50 less per year.

Contrast that to the bill we have before us today whereby commercial properties are seeing a 100 per cent increase on the rate put on them, industrial properties a 64 per cent increase and for primary production a 189 per cent increase in the levy that is being put on those property owners. For households around the state, the households that are going to be slugged with this levy, it is \$60 more. Contrast that to the approach of the coalition under the former Treasurer, the member for Rowville, and the member for Malvern. They undertook tax reform that actually ensured that there would be less of a tax burden on Victorians – that there would be \$100 million less in tax revenue collected, saving Victorians. Compare that to this government, which at every opportunity looks for a way to slug Victorians more in tax.

This is a tax that has had no consultation with the local councils that have been tapped on the shoulder by this government to say, ‘Well, we’re going to put in place a new tax, but we don’t really want to collect it. We don’t really want to be the bad guys in this situation, so we’re going to make local councils collect this tax. You can slog it on ratepayers.’ There was no consultation as to how that will happen, how that administrative burden will be placed on local councils, and that is why I support the reasoned amendment put in place by the member for Brighton to ensure that there is consultation undertaken.

We have heard a lot today about the incredible work of our volunteers when it comes to emergency services and those paid workers when it comes to emergency services. I think we all thank them for their incredible sacrifice and the work that they do, but what is not clear under this piece of legislation is how those volunteers will be given a rebate when it comes to this levy. The government has said that volunteers will be given a leave pass when it comes to this levy, but there is no detail as to what that means. From our understanding what it means is they are going to have to pay it, and then we will work out the detail later. Maybe you will have to fill in a form to try and claim it back. Our volunteers, who give up their time in many ways and many times sacrifice their lives, put on the line their own lives for their local communities, are going to be slugged with this big new tax, and there is no plan, there is no detail, as to how that can be claimed back. It is unacceptable that once again we are seeing this government rush in, tax first and work out the details later.

There is one reason and one reason alone why we are here debating this bill today. There is one reason why we are now seeing a big new tax put on Victorians – Victorians who already pay the highest taxes in the nation. They pay the highest property taxes in the nation. We have seen the Allan Labor government time and time again introduce new taxes – more than 60 new taxes, fees and charges over the course of the past decade under this government. If you ask Victorians ‘Are you better off? Do you have access to better services?’ I promise you it will be a resounding no from Victorians. But the one reason why this tax has to be introduced today, why the services that were previously funded under consolidated revenue now need to come from a new levy on Victorians at a time Victorians can least afford it, is because this government cannot manage money – \$188 billion of debt in the coming years and \$1 million a day in interest repayments under this government’s watch. Why? Because we are seeing cost blowouts on major projects – over \$50 billion of cost blowouts on major projects. Just today there was another example of the blatant waste and mismanagement of taxpayers money when it comes to the West Gate Tunnel – another billion dollars.

Why are these projects blowing out? Why are these major projects blowing out, with Victorians having to pay the price through new taxes like this? Because this government is more interested in cozying up to the CFMEU, these thugs on building sites – on government-run building sites – and funnelling money to the CFMEU, organised crime, bikies and thugs than it is in actually protecting the interests of Victorian taxpayers, actually making sure that Victorian taxpayers are getting value for their taxpayer money, getting value when it comes to funding these essential services, emergency services, through consolidated revenue, not by putting a big new tax on every single Victorian property owner because this government cannot manage money. It was Margaret Thatcher that said eventually you run out of other people’s money.

Members interjecting.

Jess WILSON: I knew they would love that, but this government is running out very, very quickly.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (16:45): I am delighted to rise to speak on the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025, and I am a little lost for words having to stand to follow a quote from Margaret Thatcher. I never thought I would see those days, but I think it really does speak to the problem that we are facing with this bill that the opposition seems fixated on their three-word catchphrases – ‘can’t manage money’, ‘big new tax’. I wish that they could get beyond three words; it is a really bad deal that none of us need to see. But what it speaks to really is their values. It speaks to their values: it is all about the money.

What this bill is about is not just for them to talk endlessly about blowouts of costs and so forth; this is about volunteers. It is about people who put their lives on the line to protect all of us, and I think that there is no amount of money that is enough to say thank you to those wonderful people. But in government, because we can manage money, we need to find ways to fund them, and we do know we have seen an absolute increase in the call-outs for particularly the SES but all of our emergency services. I can remember being on my farm in the early 2000s. A terrible drought came through, and we got one-in-100 funding for that drought. Sadly, our wonderful Minister for Agriculture has had to announce support packages for the south-west farms, which are again in drought, and it is certainly not a hundred years since I was there. These acts of nature, forces of nature, are without question recurring much more often than they did in the past.

This bill really came about as a consequence of a campaign that the SES volunteers got together and ran, and I remember meeting with local SES volunteers to talk about the importance of this campaign. So this bill really is about those people and all that they have done for us, and we need to fund them so that they can continue to be there for us in our hour of need. But I do want to point out that the SES do so much more than just deal with weather. One of the wonderful SES branches in my electorate is the Bacchus Marsh SES, and I have met with them on many occasions. They are a really great group, growing and supporting young people through their ranks. But sadly, a lot of the work that they do is around car accidents. They go out to what are pretty difficult situations and quite literally save people's lives with some of the equipment that could get funded under this new levy – for example, I think they call them the jaws of life, a piece of machinery that can get people out of cars after they have had a car accident. So whilst definitely we are having many more weather incidents, I also want to acknowledge that they do so much more than that. I really do want to give a shout-out to the Bacchus Marsh SES for the extraordinary work they do.

I was delighted – I think it was such a wonderful idea – that the Speaker, for International Women's Day, invited our female first responders to come into Parliament. I had the wonderful Lauren Majewski and Erin Phillips, who are both with the Bacchus Marsh SES, come in. I do want to thank the Speaker for that, because it was lovely. They felt really acknowledged, and that was a great way to acknowledge them. But an incredibly important way to acknowledge them is to fund them, and this bill is so important in providing that funding.

As I said, those on the other side like to shout about taxes and so forth, but really what we are talking about here is people – both the people that volunteer, including making sure that they have the equipment they need, and also the people that they go out to help. I would be interested to know if those people that have been so happy to see the SES in their gorgeous orange outfits turn up in their hour of need would like to know that the member for Kew is more fixated with the CFMEU than she is about providing funding for those people. I certainly know my constituents applaud the funding for the SES. They love them. We know how much they do for us, and this bill will really provide for them. It is to boost the funding not just for the SES but also for Triple Zero Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Emergency Recovery Victoria, the CFA and FRV. To all of those outfits I would like to say thank you. I know quite a few people who worked in the forest fire group when we had some fires in Dereel. They came in afterwards and helped with the mop-up. The CFA captain in Dereel talked about what a great bloke the forest fire bloke was in terms of supporting them through those times. We have these extraordinary emergency services, and we need to make sure that they have the funding.

This bill amounts to nothing less than \$250 million worth of funding for CFA and SES equipment. Every year one of the wonderful parts of this job is to go and celebrate with our local CFAs their most recent volunteer emergency services equipment grant. I know that I will be able to go out and celebrate with my SES brigades that they too now may have a new truck or a new piece of equipment, like those incredibly important jaws of life. I look forward to that day. I do want those on the other side to be cognisant of the fact that they are standing here blocking that money. They are blocking that money on some sort of ideological rant about taxes.

The member for Monbulk gave an extraordinary contribution; it was really heartfelt. She obviously has a lot to do with her brigades. I think what I took away from her contribution as well is that we do pay taxes and we do pay levies for all of the things that we want in this world. If those on the other side want to cut that tax, then perhaps they should go off and live on a desert island on their own. For me, taxes are about funding all of the things that we as a community need. We pay those taxes for our education system and our health system, and we should absolutely be supporting our emergency services. Tax is not the ugly word that the Liberals imagine it to be. In fact it is about communities coming together and working together. We all like to hold up countries like Norway and Sweden as being wonders of social outcomes, and they have high tax rates because that is what it is about. It is putting into our community to get back. Those on the other side are just fixated with small government. God forbid they ever get into government, but they would certainly be small if they were, because they are small people that do not want to fund our essential services. They do not want to fund our –

Jess Wilson interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: Absolutely, you are small people, that is right, who will not fund our SES. They are small people who are more interested in talking about tax and throwing around three-word slogans that they think might garner them a few tragic votes. We are much more interested in supporting the people who will benefit, those wonderful volunteers, from the funding from the levy in this bill and indeed the people that they go out to help. Perhaps those on the other side might sit back and wonder why they have been out of government for so long. I suggest that it is because people in Victoria know that they do not care about people in Victoria; they care about three-line slogans that they think will win votes and do not.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (16:55): I rise today to oppose the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. This will be an unfair tax burden, there has been a lack of consultation and it will be negative for Victoria. As the member for Benambra mentioned earlier, this is mutton dressed up as lamb. The government is renowned for taxes. The Allan Labor government have continued to engage in debt-fuelled spending, punishing Victorians with almost 60 new and increased taxes on employment, schools, rent, holidays and more to pay for their waste and their debt.

Let us look at this bill. Point one: there has been general condemnation of this levy increase. This bill seeks to replace the fire services property levy (FSPL) with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF), increasing the amount raised by \$610.9 million in 2025–26 and \$765 million more per year by 2026–27. This is a \$2.1 billion tax hike over three years. It will nearly double the household levies by \$60 per year and massively increase costs for farmers by 189 per cent. Landlords will face significant hikes, beyond the hikes they have already experienced, further and further driving up rental costs. As the Mansfield shire mayor Steve Rabie said, this is a tax plain and simple. How much more can Victorians put up with?

The second point is that local councils are not equipped to collect and administer the levy properly. Warnings from the Municipal Association of Victoria about the administrative complexity and potential for backlash from ratepayers have been profound. Local government should not be made to do the government's dirty work, and this bill will just add to the cost shifting and burden shifting that has been going on from this state government to local councils.

Third, there is a flawed volunteer rebate scheme. With this, volunteers were promised exemptions but will actually have to pay up-front and claim a rebate. There is also a question as to how the rebate will work. Even the government could not explain it in their own bill briefing. There have been suggestions that there should be outright exemptions instead of forcing volunteers into bureaucratic red tape.

Fourth, there is the impact on renters as well as rental providers. The government is planning to charge rental providers a higher rate than owner-occupiers. The Treasurer also commented that rental providers generally have a higher capacity to pay. These comments are disgraceful. It is an attack in

particular on mum-and-dad investors, who often only own one property, and proves how much Labor hates investors as well as home owners. It is no wonder that rental providers are getting out of the market and that rent is going up with less supply. Victorian landlords are exiting the market in droves and Victoria is becoming more and more difficult to invest in. For example, the number of rentals fell from about 677,000 in September 2023 to 652,000 in 2024, a 3.6 per cent fall in total Victorian rentals. This means less houses for renters and increased housing insecurity. So it is clear that this bill will worsen the housing crisis.

Indeed we have also had comments from many local community groups – a couple in my electorate, one from the local CFA. A captain from the local CFA said that this levy will see communities left vulnerable. He said that instead of an unfair levy, the government should be prioritising structural reforms. The Victorian Farmers Federation Mornington Peninsula also is calling for urgent action to stop or amend this unfair levy before it financially cripples local farmers. They have even suggested alternatives, such as a universal levy, deducting site value from capital improved value before applying the levy, applying FSPL only to the house and curtilage or establishing a differential ESVF rate similar to Melbourne Water's drainage levy.

In conclusion, the opposition cannot support this bill in its current form. I and we support the reasoned amendment put forth by the member for Brighton. The government needs to go back to the drawing board and come up with a fair and sustainable funding model instead of further punishing rental providers, farmers, CFA members and more.

The SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of the remaining items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The house is considering the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025. The minister has moved that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Brighton has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all the words after 'That' and replace them with the words which have been circulated. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Brighton should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (50): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (50): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De

Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

The SPEAKER: As the required statement of intention has been made under section 85(5)(c) of the Constitution Act 1975, the third reading of the bill must be passed with an absolute majority.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (50): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to by absolute majority.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Melissa Horne:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Danny O'Brien's amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government:

(1) provides evidence that its reforms will reduce gambling harm;

- (2) evaluates and reports on the feasibility of new technology such as facial recognition technology and automated risk monitoring systems;
- (3) delivers a process to protect border clubs from financial drift to interstate clubs; and
- (4) improves parliamentary oversight of the reforms.'

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Gippsland South has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all the words after 'That' and replace them with the words which appear on the notice paper. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Gippsland South should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:16): I move:

That the sitting be continued.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Sessional orders

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:16): I move:

That the following sessional order be adopted, to come into operation from 1 April 2025:

‘18 Order of government business

So much of standing orders 146, 148(1) and 150 are suspended to allow, on days on which government business has precedence, ministers to list government notices of motion and orders of the day at the head of the list on the notice paper in whatever order they wish. Government notices and orders are then dealt with in the order they are listed on the notice paper. After a government notice or order has been disposed of, the Speaker will either call the minister to move the next notice of motion or direct the Clerk to read the next order of the day, as appropriate.'

Members interjecting.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Who would have thought that such a motion would invite so much opposition already – I have hardly had a chance to say anything – from those on the other side of the house. What are we doing here with this motion? It is quite simple. We are making a minor change to the sessional orders in order that this house may run more efficiently and effectively. What is more, it is a simple change, one that is all part of making sure that we have a Parliament that reflects the views of the public by being efficient and getting on with the real business of the day, which is the government business program as set down by the government. This is a minor change to the sessional orders that only affects the order of government business on a sitting day. It is a very simple and a very basic change. Under the current rules, notices have to be dealt with before moving on to orders of the day, such as bills, motions or other government business. The practical impact of this change is that the government can order notices, bills and motions in whatever order we wish. And do you know what? One of the benefits of winning government is being able to come into this place and establish a government business program. Let us be clear: we are seizing that opportunity. We are going to make this change, and we are doing it because we are the government. We have the numbers in this place and –

A member interjected.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I am going to take up the interjection. Apparently we do not believe in democracy. Let me tell you what democracy delivered in 2014, in 2018 and in 2022. Democracy –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the House moved somewhat from the motion but also started to take up interjections, which is disorderly.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to speak to the motion before the house.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: We are talking about the rules of the house, and indeed I do think the debate does allow me to discuss the concept of democracy. Democracy is one which I think is relevant to what we are discussing here tonight. Indeed the people of this state in 2014, 2018 and 2022 have elected substantial Labor majority governments here in this place, and we have not wasted a moment in the time that we have had here in government in order to deliver on the things that matter to the people of Victoria. I will concede that the standing orders do not much matter to the people of Victoria. That is why we are seeking to make a very simple change to the sessional orders in order to enable us to prioritise the business that we as the government recognise and understand and agree is the highest priority on any given sitting day.

In terms of the practical impact of this change, it is that the government can order notices, bills and motions in whatever order we wish. I do not really know how you can argue against that. To be clear, the government can effectively already do this, but this change will clean that process up and make the chamber run a bit smoother. I think we can probably all agree that if there is an opportunity to avoid the regular audition from the member for Brighton for the leadership position then that is probably a good thing. As far as I can tell, that will be the only real effect on the opposition – that there will be less opportunities for the member for Brighton to grandstand in this place and in doing so, I might say, seek to embarrass the current Manager of Opposition Business in the way in which he seeks to undermine her as she goes about her job.

This is, as I said, a pretty simple question. I have got a lot of time on the clock. I do not intend to use it, because I can tell you what, there are many notices of motion on the paper for this evening. I am sure we are all going to look forward to speaking to a number of them. I am going to leave it for my colleagues to contribute further on this debate, but I commend this rather short, simple and efficient change to the house.

BrIDGET VALLENCE (Evelyn) (17:23): This motion demonstrates everything wrong about this tired Labor government. This motion demonstrates how much this Labor government is obsessed with power and control. It will stop at nothing to silence its critics, especially the opposition and especially any non-government member of Parliament, whether they be from the Liberal Party, the National Party, the Greens or the independents. That is exactly what this motion seeks to do. Do not let this government try to pull the wool over your eyes. For the Victorians out there watching this, do not let the government try to pull the wool over your eyes. At its core this motion is undemocratic because it seeks to trash the fairness and the balance that the current standing orders attempt to achieve.

It is really regrettable that this motion is before the house today, because it only seeks to diminish the voices of those who dare to speak against this Labor government – this tired, 10-year-old, decaying Labor government. It is a motion that is designed to save the Premier's job. It is a motion that is designed to save the Premier's leadership, because it is unravelling before our eyes. The former Premier Daniel Andrews did not need to make this extraordinary move.

A member interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! It is not too late to be removed from the chamber.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: And we would not lose anything, Speaker, if that occurred. The former Premier Daniel Andrews did not need to make such a change, because dare I say it, despite my disagreement severely with his politics, the former Premier Andrews had control of this chamber. But what we see under the decaying leadership of the new Premier Allan is it is all falling apart and it is all unravelling. The Premier's office have advised that they want to make this change because they want to get some more control because they are losing it, quite frankly. This motion has not even been reviewed by the Standing Orders Committee. A fundamental principle is we have committees and scrutiny in this institution, in Parliament. Let us not forget that this is Parliament and the Legislative Assembly here is the people's chamber, yet Victorians are being denied a voice through the members on this side – all non-government members. As I say, former Premier Daniel Andrews did not need to

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1218

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

take this extraordinary step. Only because the leadership is at risk with Premier Allan are the government and the Premier's office taking this extraordinary step.

As I say, most of these kinds of changes and changes of significant nature really should go to the Standing Orders Committee for further scrutiny to make sure that there is a problem – what problem are we trying to solve? – and to take it through that due process of the Standing Orders Committee. That has not been done with this motion. This motion is something that was cooked up in the Premier's office and has been put forward and rushed through, which just smacks of desperation by this government. As I say, it has not been to the Standing Orders Committee. This government seeks, as it always does with this chamber and with Victorians, to ride roughshod over our democratic processes.

The standing orders are relied on by all who participate in and follow the work of this house as an authoritative source and the practice of the house. It is a longstanding practice of the house that we have had with notices of motion on the paper to be dispensed with first before we move to the orders of the day. It is a situation where all Victorians – not just those who are members of the chamber but all Victorians – are able to review what is on the standing orders. As I say, they are longstanding. They are very reasonable practice. The current standing orders reflect fair and reasonable practice, and that is what this Labor government does not like. They do not like fairness. They do not like integrity. They do not like equitable processes. They want to ride roughshod over all of these processes.

This motion seeks to destroy the balance and centralise more power with this Labor government. As I said, do not let this Labor government and do not let the Leader of the House pull the wool over your eyes. The Leader of the House in her contribution said that this was a minor change. It is not. That is false. In fact when the Leader of the House was briefing me about this change she said quite directly, 'We are the government and we are exercising our authority and our control,' and that is precisely what this motion is about. It is not because it respects the fair and equitable processes of this Parliament. It does not respect the institution of this Parliament as former premiers and governments have done. There is no sound reason for this change, no sound reason whatsoever. It is purely because this government wants to exercise its power and it is trying to save the failing leadership of its Premier, Premier Allan. As I say again, former Premier Andrews did not see the need for this change, and it just demonstrates the desperation and the lengths to which the government will go.

This government now wants to control the order in which the notices of motion are debated, and if motions are passed it means that no matter if a member of this place has been waiting for months to debate a motion which they have listed on the notice paper, the government's motions will always take preference and be debated first. It has been raised many, many times in this chamber how non-government members also represent Victorians and also have the right to be able to raise matters and seek to debate motions in this chamber, but this government seeks to silence not only those non-government members but also the voices of Victorians who live in electorates that are not represented by a government member. I think that that is a sad day for democracy in the state of Victoria. It is not fair, and it is simply a shameful power grab by this Labor government. It just demonstrates that they know things are changing.

We have already seen in the past 12 or so months a very, very lame legislative agenda. Obviously they do not want to do the work on legislation and the legislative agenda. They just want to bring in these sledge motions, these very ridiculous motions that, more often than not, do not actually talk about matters of importance to the Victorian people but seek to disparage members in this chamber. I think that is a reflection of people. If people want to be name-calling and have those kinds of motions that seek to disparage an opposition, a minor party like the Greens or any members in particular, it is just a reflection on the people bringing those motions. You only have to read some of the motions that the Labor Party and the Labor government bring. They seek to disparage people within this chamber. All that does is go to the lowest common denominator. It does not help represent the interests and the matters that are most important and crucial to Victorians right now.

This motion does nothing to address the crime crisis in Victoria. This motion does nothing to address the shocking youth crime crisis in Victoria. This motion does nothing to address the cost-of-living crisis in Victoria. All this motion is is a nasty, ridiculous power grab. It smacks of desperation from this Labor government. It is an absolute affront to the traditions of this house. This Labor government do not want to be accountable. They do not want to be accountable for their actions. They have no integrity; they lack integrity. I hear day in and day out from people in my community the lack of integrity this government has. They just do not care. There is no transparency and no accountability, and this motion proves exactly that.

As I said, it is an affront to the traditions of this house. The standing orders that are before us today have been around for a very long time. There has been no previous need to change them. There has been no genuine reason provided by this Labor government as to why they need to change them now, other than, as I said, the Leader of the House saying to me directly, 'We're the government. We can do this. Let's just do this. We're doing it anyway.' It just demonstrates that it is not about any meaningful change. It is not actually tackling any of the crises that are occurring in Victoria under this Labor government. All it is doing is, with the government losing control, saving the leadership of Premier Jacinta Allan and trying to harness back a little bit of control because they are losing it at a rapid rate of knots. They see it in the polls. They see it in the disastrous results from the recent by-elections in Werribee and Prahran. They experienced the crime crisis there, the cost-of-living crisis –

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I just thought I would give the Manager of Opposition Business a bit of a chop-out. She needs time to gather her thoughts and bring together a bit more of a cogent statement, so I am hoping I have given her long enough after a couple of minutes in. She has spent 10 minutes waffling now.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order, member for Point Cook?

Mathew Hilakari: It is on relevance.

The SPEAKER: I do ask the member for Evelyn to come back to the motion before the house.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: As I was saying, it is an affront to the traditions of this house to undermine the standing orders in such a way and for a nasty power grab. It was bad enough that earlier this week we received a bill to change the government's weakened bail laws. They wanted to debate it with urgency on the Tuesday, but dismally, showed no courtesy of providing the community with this bill in a timely fashion. We got it at 6 pm on the night before it was to be debated with urgency. That just demonstrates the arrogance and the shameful behaviour of this Labor government.

What is even worse is that this government is using its power to shut down debate and force this house to vote on bills and motions and have these motions without the opportunity for genuine procedural debate on them. They are going to be removing the opportunity for that because they do not want to be frustrated. They do not want non-government members – members of the Liberals, Nationals, Greens and independents – to hold them to account. They just want to be a dictatorship. It is just more activity like that. We have seen it year after year, and it is just getting worse. They saw that that is how they grabbed control under their former Premier Andrews – the dictator style that he had with the world's longest lockdowns in the pandemic, which had the worst results from a health perspective.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. The member for Evelyn will come back to the motion before the house.

BrIDGET VALLENCE: What this Labor government is doing is utterly disgraceful. Again, it is going to prevent members on this side of the chamber, all non-government members, from being able to participate in the way that they used to be able to do and that they have been able to do for so long and represent their communities, who are Victorians too. I think it is shameful, and I know that the Labor government know it, but they frankly do not care. They do not care for the institution of this

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1220

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

Parliament, they do not care for the longstanding tradition of these current standing orders and they do not care for Victorians. We oppose this motion.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (17:35): Goodness me. I appreciate that my desk area looks a little bit like that of Dennis Denuto in *The Castle*, but the reason I have a few papers set out here is that I read this motion before coming into this place. I read it, and my interpretation of it in pretty simple English was that it involved a few standing orders – that is why I have got the standing orders here – about the consideration of orders of the day and the precedence of motions, and they are 148 and 150 but also standing order 146. I thought it related to quite a simple change to the sequencing of motions that we consider in this place, but I had to read it again. I was astonished to hear the Manager of Opposition Business talk about what this motion, this simple administrative motion, entails. It is doing a lot of heavy lifting. It is going to result in a dictatorship! I wonder, Speaker, if you could ask one of your attendants to see if in fact Charles I is behind the Speaker's dais –

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Greenvale, you know you cannot ask the Speaker questions.

Iwan WALTERS: No, Speaker. I do apologise. I withdraw. But it alarms me that we may be, according to the Manager of Opposition Business, descending into an anarchic police state and that the spectre of Charles I could be here and abrogating parliamentary sovereignty. I am here on behalf of the members of Greenvale – according to the Manager of Opposition Business many of whom are tuning in this evening. I hope that missing *The Chase* is not causing too much of a wrench, but it is lovely to have you on board with us this evening for this debate. But no. While I knew in my heart of hearts that the member for Brighton was a Cromwellian Roundhead, I did not know that the Manager of Opposition Business was as well.

I do return to the era of Charles I because this is a minor change to the standing orders. It gives effect to government business on a sitting day. It is a simple and basic change. The Manager of Opposition Business expressed alarm that this motion does not address the cost-of-living crisis and does not put more police on the streets, and I am here to say no, it does not. But it is an administrative change that enables us to get to motions that do, to get to motions that enable us to talk about how this government is supporting families in my electorate of Greenvale, in Point Cook, in Wendouree, in all of the 18 regional electorates that we represent, supporting them with the cost of living, investing in their schools and keeping our streets safe. The Manager of Opposition Business also bemoaned that apparently we have no legislative agenda. I looked around. Again, it is 20 to 6. We are here precisely because we have an important legislative agenda to ensure that the streets of Victoria are safe, that those who ignore the privilege that bail is are enabled –

Members interjecting.

Iwan WALTERS: The member for Nepean is very voluble, unlike in question time. He did have a question today. Well, he had many. He had many questions in that brief interlude. He was making up for lost time, but that is okay. I come back to the motion.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Greenvale might still be fairly new, but he should know by now that this is a fairly limited motion and he needs to stick to it.

The SPEAKER: Yes. I remind all members that this is a motion that is listed on the notice of business, and I hope that members will stick to that motion.

Iwan WALTERS: I certainly shall, and I mourn the death of irony at that point of order. This simple motion does not abrogate parliamentary sovereignty. The idea that the elected government somehow enabling a provision of this place to be able to debate things of substance, to amend the notice paper, somehow translates into a power grab by the Crown, it did sound, in that contribution, like the 1640s whereby the rights of a sovereign parliament were being traduced. That is simply untrue. We are all, as the Manager of Opposition Business said, elected members of this place, but there has been evolution of parliamentary traditions over many, many years, and this minor, minor, minor tweak

will enable us to revert to things which matter to our communities, to get back to those motions relating to the cost of living and relating to investments in health, rather than things which are rigidly set in place according to a sequence.

The member for Eildon is right – I have not been in this place as long as the member for Rowville or others, but I am still rather shocked to find that we are in this position of needing to have quite a long, unwieldy debate simply to make a very minor change to the notice paper to enable us to talk about things which matter to our communities. But no, there were more metaphors in the Manager of Opposition Business's contribution than you can poke a stick at, and there indeed I go again. But again, the idea that this simple administrative motion somehow denotes an obsession with power, a dictatorship, that it abrogates the people's chamber, that there is no legislative agenda, I think this is a very, very long bow indeed to draw. On the evolution of parliamentary sovereignty that I have talked about, I come back to Charles I, Speaker, and I think you are very live to that era, given the –

The SPEAKER: Order! I am not that old, member for Greenvale.

Iwan WALTERS: I withdraw. There was no intention –

The SPEAKER: Order! I think that is a reflection on the Chair.

Members interjecting.

Iwan WALTERS: The member for South-West Coast again exemplifies that incredible inverse relationship between her willingness to contribute and the quality of what she contributes. I was merely reflecting on the fact that the role of the Speaker in that era was one upon which there was significant risk, as a representative of this entire house, towards the Crown. A representative of the House of Commons in that era towards the Crown – that placed significant threat upon the office of the Speaker in that era, and I was talking about the office of the Speaker and not the personage of the Speaker embodied by you, Speaker.

Of course, parliamentary sovereignty has evolved. We have an era where all of us are elected representatives. The idea that somehow this change reflects an unelected Crown making adjustments willy-nilly to the notice paper is an absurdity. We are all elected, and the government has been elected with the number of members that it has stretching all the way around to the member for Preston, who will be contributing on this motion shortly. So it is entirely appropriate that the government does seek to ensure that the house can operate in a way that ensures that the priorities of the community are able to be discussed. Again, I come back to that idea that I find it an unusual situation for us to be needing to have a very long, quite unwieldy debate simply to get onto matters that are very important, like the cost of living for Victorians and the way in which this government is supporting them.

I could go on, and I will. To move from the era of the English Civil War, which of course ended with the Restoration in 1660, through that Restoration era from 1660 to the Glorious Revolution – so-called 'glorious'. I think for many minorities in England it was not so glorious indeed. But that did cement the idea of parliamentary sovereignty and a responsible and constrained constitutional monarchy. Again I come back to that idea that the notion that this motion somehow abrogates that convention is an absurdity. We have had a very strong system of parliamentary sovereignty in this jurisdiction and others for many centuries. The role of the Crown in Parliament has evolved as well. Robert Walpole was the first Prime Minister, and obviously the Premier inherits that equivalent position. For the Manager of Opposition Business to suggest that somehow that is a position of a dictator I think is a regretful reflection upon the Premier and those before who have held that office.

I have given something of an explanation as to why I am supporting this motion this evening. I think it is a sensible motion, a constrained motion, a reasonable motion that will enable us as a house to debate the issues that are particularly important to our communities. I touched on one, the cost of living, and why it is important that as a government and as a Parliament we are supporting our communities with the cost of living. I think it is worthwhile for us to move onto that in due course

once this immediate motion has been addressed in order to enable us to do that. I support the motion. I commend it to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (17:45): I am pleased to say a few words on this. I am also pleased to find that, given the rumours that abound about the member for Essendon moving on, we have found a new member for Essendon who can take us into speeches going back to the 16th century. Did Cromwell get a mention? I think Cromwell did get a mention. King Charles got several mentions. I think the member for Greenvale has got a little way to go, because the member for Essendon always goes back at least a thousand years for his issues. You could learn a lot. But we are all very relieved that if the member for Essendon does succumb, we have got someone in the member for Greenvale to take over his role as the archivist of the Parliament, perhaps.

It is important to understand the context of a decision like this. It may well be a small decision, it may well not have an enormous bearing on what this Parliament does, but it is the context of what else the Parliament does as well. I find it a little bit revealing, both the Leader of the House's and the member for Greenvale's commentary that this is exactly democracy because they won. Well, by extension, what does the Parliament even sit for then? Because if the government can just do whatever it likes, we do not need to be here. As the member for Evelyn indicated, those people who got elected and are not forming part of the government deserve the opportunity to have their say on behalf of their community.

Again I go back to the idea that this particular motion does not necessarily take away the right of those of us to have our say, but it is in the context of the many other things that do not happen in this chamber already. One of them, I note, Speaker, given your activity at the moment, is that the air conditioner does not seem to work in this chamber at this place.

The SPEAKER: I advise members that the air conditioning has just been turned back on.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am glad, because I would not want to have to keep diverting from the debate at hand. But what I am talking about here is a number of little changes that the government has made over its 10 years in power. I say 'in power' and not 'in office' because that is what the government seems to think this is about. It is about their power. They seem to think that because they have got a majority in the lower house they can do whatever they want with the lower house. I know there will be a time where those opposite will become those on this side, and they will have a very, very different view. Not all of you, because some of you will not be here, but that will be –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: I was not looking at anyone in particular, member for Narre Warren North. But I am sure they will take a very different view of democracy and parliamentary procedure. What we have seen, as I have said, is this incremental movement and diminishing of the role of the Parliament and the ability of the Parliament to manage its own affairs without the executive just constantly pulling rank. It is incremental. It is creeping. One might say there are creeping assumptions that are made by the government that they can assume to just take whatever they want and do these things. We have heard those figures before.

I do not profess to say that this particular motion before us is a sign of dictatorship, but it is creeping towards dictatorship, because if the government just does whatever it wants in the chamber, the essence of parliamentary democracy is polluted. As I said, this is in context. This is in the context where I understand we are the only chamber in an Australian parliament that does not have general business, that does not have an opportunity for non-government members to introduce legislation and debate it and to debate motions that they would like. I have been here for 10 years, and we have had in that time two – I think the member for Brighton might correct me – maybe three, consideration-in-detail stages on a piece of legislation. Consideration in detail should not be something that the government is worried about. In fact upper house members, members in the other place, do them all the time. I feel sorry sometimes for the ministers in the other place who have to take carriage of

business. In fact it is happening right now. It is the reason why we are here. But the ministers in this place do not seem absolutely capable of defending or explaining their own legislation – either that or the government just thinks it can do what it likes and it does not need to bother with that small thing of democracy. I go to some quotes, because I do not think the member for Greenvale went to quotes, but he certainly went to history. I picked up this one a moment ago:

What is Parliament for if it is not to be a means to make ministers accountable for the services for which they are responsible?

It is a quote from Michael Howard, who I think was John Howard's brother – no, I might be making that up. The point is true: the Parliament is here to hold the executive to account, not for the executive just to ride roughshod over the Parliament, and when I say roughshod over the Parliament I mean over the people of Victoria, who have elected us all here. It is a point that I took very seriously in my 10 years – you get less for murder – on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and it is something that I tried to impart on government members of PAEC. You have got your job to defend the government, and I get that. Everyone understands that.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair.

Danny O'BRIEN: Sorry, Speaker. They have their job, but they also have a role in holding the executive to account, and that includes ministers – and we know that none of those that I ever served with on PAEC ever held a minister to account – and also holding the public service to account.

Gary Maas interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: No, not once, member for Narre Warren South, did I ever see a government member held to account. Actually, we got to hold the member for –

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, Leader of the Nationals.

Danny O'BRIEN: That was actually through the Chair.

Bridget Vallence interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: The member for Preston, yes. Actually, he was not the only one. There were a few others around the place that were public servants at times – but anyway, I digress. It is the case that motions like this reflect the fact that the government does not want a Parliament, it wants an audience. It just wants to stand up and say what it wants, move what it wants, put through what it wants and to hell with the consequences. One of the problems with that is you get the bad decisions and the bad legislation that we have had under this government. We have seen two today, I would argue. The gambling legislation is one, and particularly the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund legislation, otherwise known as the emergency services tax, which reflects, as I said, the lack of an agenda or a wrong agenda in our view. It is something that I think this motion is set up to deal with, because as the member for Evelyn said, too often these days we find the government with a very light agenda, and they want to be able to bring in more of these motions. The member for Brighton might refer them to them as sledge motions. I would certainly say they are a political waste of time. I should have said too – he has gone now, the member for Greenvale – I do not think I have heard someone complain so often about a contribution wasting the chamber's time, but then he took his full 10 minutes in doing so. That is another issue.

Again, I take umbrage at the government's position on these changes; as I say, creeping contextual changes, which all diminish the ability of the Parliament. I take objection to the commentary of 'Well, we won the election, so we can do what we want.' As I said, they won the election to be the executive; they did not win the Parliament. There are tens of thousands of people represented by people on this side who are not part of the government, and those people deserve the opportunity to have their say, to have a proper procedure and to have the traditions of the Parliament respected at every turn. This motion is just another example, and we saw it through the pandemic in particular. We saw it under the previous Premier in particular – time and time again the role of the Parliament was diminished. The

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1224

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

ability of parliamentarians to hold the executive to account through things like a consideration-in-detail phase just does not happen under this government. We do not even have ministers 99 times out of 100 come in and answer any questions on the adjournment debate, which happened regularly under the previous coalition government. This is a motion that reflects a government that does not want a Parliament; it wants an audience, and it should not be supported in this chamber.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (17:55): I rise to support the motion from the Leader of the House, which, as we know, seeks to amend the sessional orders with relation to standing orders 146, 148(1) and 150, relating to government notices of motion and government orders of the day.

With your indulgence, Speaker, just before I do, there is a very significant Macedonian community in the part of the world that I represent. I know that other members here, particularly the member for Thomastown, represent large Macedonian communities, and I would just like to acknowledge in this place of course the recent tragedy in Macedonia – the nightclub fire in Kočani in the north-east of Macedonia, which has led to 59 deaths and I understand about 150 or so more people who are injured, some very seriously injured. Macedonia has declared, I think, seven days of mourning, and I understand a mass burial service is being held in the next 24 hours. The member for Thomastown might have something further to say about that, but on behalf of the members of that Macedonian community who I represent I want to express our sorrow and our thoughts for those directly affected and the broader Macedonian community. Cr Connie Boglis, who is up in our part of the world, let me know that there is an appeal going on at the moment, which members of our community and other members are encouraged to contribute to.

Coming back to the motion that we have in front of us, it of course relates to the standing orders. I am grateful to my colleagues who apparently decided that I was the person to stand up. There are several motions on the notice paper, as we all know, this evening concerning many important issues. This one is probably a little more dry and technical. I am not sure why it was that others did not leap upon it, but I am very happy to speak about it at some length.

As we know, the standing orders divide up the business of Parliament and what we do. There is formal business, there is government business and then there are other categories of things, like question time and so forth. For those of us, like the member for Pascoe Vale, who are relatively new to this place, some of them, like the grievance debate, are a little unusual when you first encounter them. But they are venerable arrangements. Indeed the member for Gippsland South is leaving the chamber, but he did complain that there are not opportunities for non-government members to speak, and I suppose the grievance debate is in fact one.

The motion that we have before us addresses in particular how the notice paper operates, and again, for those of us who are relatively new to this place, I might just step through the mechanics of how that operates, because of course that is pertinent to the motion we have before us. We have the notice paper, all of us, in front of us. I have a copy here. Traditionally of course it starts with notices of motion. Those are things that we have not yet debated but which the government has said it might wish to debate at some point, and they are listed in the order in which notice was given. Then we come to the orders of the day. They are things that we have already started debating – notably most commonly bills that have already had their first and second reading and been passed – and they are listed in the order in which we intend to debate them. Following that are those notices brought by non-government members; they are also listed in the order that they were given. So that, if you like, is the way we get the notice paper that we always have in front of us.

Then of course at the start of each week we have the government business program – we are all very familiar with that debate – and the purpose of the government business program is to specifically pull out those items from the notice paper that we intend to not only debate on a specific day but then of course deal with in the guillotine, which we would normally have at about 5 pm on a Thursday, although notably not today. It is very important when we think about how we address those items that we can all see on the notice paper to understand that the government and indeed any member in this

place always has the right to say that their item on the notice paper does not proceed for today and that we can come back to it on another day.

BrIDGET VALLENCE interjected.

NATHAN LAMBERT: The member for Evelyn interjects to ask why we need the changes, and I assure her that I am coming to that. But just to step through the mechanics, as I say, for those of us who are perhaps newer to this place, any member can decide at any given point that they do not want the particular notice of motion that is there to proceed and then business moves to the next thing that is on the notice paper. It is also important to point out that there is an existing standing order by which the government can reorder those items that are the orders of the day. There is already a procedure there by which the government can reorder the items under the orders of the day to whatever order that the government so chooses without the need for a procedural motion. So just to be clear about how that all generally operates, the government can bring bills forward to legislate, it can bring motions on important topics. There are of course limits to that – time limits, things having to be introduced a day before the second reading and so forth – the government has to provide certain notice and it must provide the other parties with an opportunity to speak. They are all very important principles there that are not changing at all. But to be very clear about the principles that are in the standing orders and the sessional orders, there has never been any principle that says that the opposition or other parties must be given advance notice of an item that is on the notice paper coming forward for debate. Anyone who is in opposition, or any of us in fact who are here in this place, has to be prepared to speak on all of the motions that are on the first couple of pages of the notice paper. That has always been the case. As I say, anyone can waive their right to speak on a notice of motion, and the result of that is that those notices of motion can come on at any time and all of us in this place must be prepared to speak to them.

The only thing we are saving by making this small procedural amendment that the Leader of the House has put forward is then going and having a procedural debate about the decision to change the orders of that notice of motion. The government can change the order. At the moment it just needs a procedural debate to do so. And we ask ourselves: is it necessary to have that procedural debate and to take up the time of the house when, as the member for Greenvale has pointed out, there are other things often that the government needs to discuss and that would be of value to our broader communities in discussing?

I do not want to be unfair to the many people who contribute to procedural debates, but sometimes you would think that perhaps they could be a little shorter. In fact we have all been here while numerous interjections go back and forth with people asking for members who are on their feet to return to the procedural matter and not get to the substantial matter. Procedural debates play an important role. I think a particularly important one – and this goes to things that the opposition were raising – is that sometimes the government does want to expedite the process by which it makes decisions on bills in particular. And when we do so, we have to have procedural motions, and that is appropriate and good that those procedural motions give the opposition a chance to argue against the government doing that and of course means that the government cannot make those sorts of decisions without an appropriate level of scrutiny. I think that is the broad principle. The government cannot do anything unexpected in this place without needing a procedural motion, and that gives those in other parties the opportunity to criticise that decision. But I want to emphasise this: what we are proposing here is not something that will be launching any surprises on anyone. All of us must always be prepared to speak on the items that are on the notice paper in the section that is the government business section. The government already has the ability to jump to any one of those at any time with no notice. All this procedural thing does is avoid us having to go through a debate before the government reorders those that in the first section on the notice paper.

I think when the member for Greenvale and indeed when the Leader of the House said this was a relatively minor change, they were absolutely correct in that. I do not need to repeat the comments of the member at length, but the notion that that change constituted a dictatorship – indeed I want to pick

up on a more detailed matter in the member for Evelyn's contribution. She did say that the effect of this motion that we have before us would be that the government's motions would have precedence. I just want to be very clear for her – and you would expect that she perhaps might have a good understanding of these things – that that is not what the motion does. Government motions already have precedence under the standing orders and always have. All this motion ahead of us does is change the order in which they might appear without the need for a postponement motion. It is possible that the very strong language that the member for Evelyn used about a dictatorship and so forth was because she misunderstood the motion that is in front of her. This is not giving government motions or notices of motion or orders of the day any more precedence than they already have.

I will finish on her complaint that the sessional orders and standing orders are longstanding and do not need any changes. I do not think that is something I agree with. They are important. It is important that we treat them with respect, but of course there have been many changes to the standing orders and sessional orders in this place. I was talking the other day to the Premier who was involved in the change that meant that adjournment was at 7 pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays instead of at 10 pm. I know many people in this place have families and some people have younger children to try and get home to after a sitting day, and many of us are grateful for the fact that that change, which was enacted through the sessional orders, makes this workplace a little bit more family friendly than it might have been otherwise. So there are plenty of precedents for us making positive changes to the sessional orders. I believe that the Leader of the House's motion does exactly that, and I commend it to the house and wish it a speedy passage.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:05): I can understand why the government have moved this motion at 6 o'clock at the end of a sitting week when no-one, they think, is watching. But I do want to add to the debate in a number of ways, firstly by saying that this change to the processes and operation of the house, if I can put it that way, have not gone through the Standing Orders Committee, which is unprecedented. This house creates a Standing Orders Committee so that it can consider in a bipartisan way the way this house operates, because this of course is where the government is formed but this is the people's house, and it does not presume that it is anything more than the place where all of the members who are elected to represent their communities sit. It does not presume that one particular party exists and can come in and do whatever it wants in this place. Every member should have the right to be part of the decisions of this place, the running of this place. Whether or not their views are found to be the majority is a secondary point, but every member should have the right. That is why the Standing Orders Committee exists. It provides an opportunity for members in a bipartisan way to consider any changes in the way the standing orders operate.

There has been bipartisan support pretty much to use the Standing Orders Committee. What has happened today is unprecedented. The government has said, 'Hang the Standing Orders Committee; we're going to do it our own way.' We understand why they are doing it, because they do not want to sully themselves with having to consider issues before the house, to have debates before the house and to have votes in this house, even if they were to win them, and argue their point. They do not want to argue their point.

If I can start a few words into the motion, this motion suspends elements of the standing orders themselves. The standing orders are the rules of this place. They are rules that have come together over time that have been agreed to by the members of this house. What this motion says by its own definition is 'We don't care about what the standing orders say. We want to ignore what the standing orders say and' – to quote the motion – 'suspend them, ignore them.' The three standing orders are in relation to precedence, orders of the day and when precedence is given. This government is now saying, 'We are going to suspend the rules of the house that have been written over time, we are going to do it without going to the Standing Orders Committee' – a very, very important committee in terms of the operation of this place – 'and we are going to do it at the end of a sitting week when we think no-one is looking.' It does not surprise me, because the government cannot win an argument in open debate and they do not want to win an argument in the public square. They want to sneak things

through. It is why they make every announcement at 4:59 pm on a Friday night of a long weekend. They have taken the old rule of taking out the bad news trash on a Friday night to a standard form. Has there ever been anything this government has ever done now not at 4:59 pm on the Friday of a long weekend? What this government is doing is pushing through a change to bypass this chamber.

One of the members on the other side of the chamber just spoke about the federal Parliament. I was not going to go into this, but I will. In relation to the standing orders of the federal Parliament, pretty much the standing orders that currently exist and the standing orders that were written when the Gillard minority government came into force, on two occasions I helped write the standing orders and was part of the process to write those two sets of standing orders – well, the update of the first set. What I can tell you is whenever standing orders are considered – and this is a debate for parliamentary tragi-comedies, not for everybody – this Parliament's standing orders are held up across parliaments in Australia as the worst standing orders in Australia, at a state and federal level. The clerks of all parliaments in Australia hold up our standing orders as an outrageous joke.

Tim Richardson interjected.

James NEWBURY: They do, because they are. These standing orders were first bastardised in 1999 and since then have descended into a frankly cursory document that means very little. In no way am I reflecting, but we now see standing orders not even upheld when they are in the standing orders. It means nothing anymore. We have a Standing Orders Committee. That means nothing anymore. We look at the standing order changes today – what is the point of a Standing Orders Committee? What is the point of the standing orders?

The government do not care, because they will get their win, they will get to set their motions in the order they want and they will get to debate their sledge motions and feel very clever. I notice that the only people who have contributed to this debate are so new I would suspect that not one of them has read the standing orders. They would not have read the standing orders, because the substantive arguments that I am making have not been dealt with. Why has this not been through the Standing Orders Committee? Why has it not? Why has the bipartisan Standing Orders Committee been ignored? It does operate in a bipartisan, respectful way. Why would it not be? Why would you want to then turn the notice paper from a report of what the Parliament has heard and considered, a report of that fact – that is what the notice paper is – into a government document that it can use to its own political dividend whenever it feels that it wants to? Why would it?

The government will not answer any of those questions. They will say, 'This is a simple administrative change.' Of course they will. I mean, everything they say is just not true. But what is a fact is that every single precedent this government sets in terms of taking away the good-spirited way that this Parliament should work lowers how this Parliament works forevermore. The new low normal of this government is the new low normal for this Parliament forever. This Parliament, if it was made up of good people, would recognise that and would call it out and say there are some lines that should not be crossed because we should operate well and we should behave in a way, as a chamber, that provides members with opportunities and does it in its terms of its reporting and how the standing orders work. It should not allow governments to misuse their power, and this is a misuse of power.

The government will say this is just about precedent, but no, it is not. This is a misuse of power that undermines the core instruments of this place: the Standing Orders Committee, the standing orders, the notice paper. It slipped through at the end of a day when no-one was watching. This is taking the low road that we know is a constant of this government. We as a Parliament are going to be worse off for it, and it is incredibly, incredibly disappointing.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (18:15): Honourable members of the house, I stand before you with an imaginary hat, because under the standing orders a hat was needed – an imaginary hat that would look quite fetching on the member for Brighton. The member for Brighton some might call 'the right honourable baron of Brighton'. I had a great opportunity to be able to share in the member for

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1228

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

Brighton taking us back to the Gillard government, which of course gives me the opportunity in response to say I will not be lectured to on behaviour in the house by this man.

I have spent a bit of time on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee with several friends who are here in the chamber. I know it is a very well looked after committee under the terrific stewardship it has now. The member for Laverton does a terrific job on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. But I can remember a time when the now Minister for Children, previous member for Pascoe Vale, had to really strongly censure the member for Brighton for putting his feet up on the desk.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a tight procedural debate, and everything the member said is factually untrue.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): That is a point of debate.

Pauline RICHARDS: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Brighton said there are lines that should not be crossed, and I am giving an example of what I saw at the time to be a line that ought to not be crossed.

James Newbury: This has nothing to do with the procedural debate.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): That was not your point of order, member for Brighton. The member for Cranbourne has been going for 2 minutes and should tie her point into the procedural point.

Pauline RICHARDS: I do want to refer to the standing orders and say how pleased I am to have what is often a well-thumbed version of the standing orders and also reflect on what the consequence would be if we took every change to the standing orders. I am going to get back to some of the extraordinary evolutions that we have been through in this chamber. I do want to say that if we launched an inquiry for every little thing that happens in this place, it would grind to a halt because the member for Brighton likes the sound of his own voice. There would be all sorts of arguments from those opposite that would not allow us to move forward on debates. Let us have a look at the evolution of the Victorian Parliament and the evolution of this place.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, I do not think there has been one change to the standing orders that has not been through the Standing Orders Committee.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): That is not a point of order.

Pauline RICHARDS: The member for Evelyn spoke in her opening contribution about the sorts of longstanding conventions that she holds dear. I would just like to talk about some of the other evolutions and conventions that I think are well worth leaving in the past. I think we can consider what happens when women get elected. In fact a previous member for Forest Hill was in the house this week and celebrating the opening of a childcare centre named after her daughter Charlotte, because of course the previous member for Forest Hill Kirstie Marshall was absolutely censured for breastfeeding her daughter or bringing her daughter into the chamber. Now we have three babies who we often see in this chamber with great delight because we have so many women elected to this Parliament. That is what happens when we evolve, when standing orders change, when we have an evolution.

To be frank, I was not that familiar with the notice paper before becoming the Government Whip, but there are some standing orders that I saw that I would not mind returning to. There were standing orders that allowed us to fine people for leaving the chamber. I think that is something that we might consider. Certainly duelling was an option, and I know the member for Wendouree and the member for Narracan often seem to be involved in duels. The member for Pakenham and the members for Gippsland South and Gippsland East are often involved in duels. Sometimes I feel like I would not mind seeing the Usher of the Black Rod chasing people down the corridors when they are not covering off on their duty. But in the absence of that, I will continue to use the tools that I have in my kitbag.

Back to some of the other reasons why we need to evolve and why this motion is so important for us to debate: it is because we need to make sure that this Parliament represents a modern and evolved Parliament, and that is what this commonsense and practical motion does. The member for Evelyn spoke quite a lot about the consequences of change, and I think that we have seen that the consequences of change have been evidenced by things like toilets for women. Imagine if we went back, not a long way, to when women were needing to be held behind a screen in this Parliament because they were not to be seen.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I know this has been a little broader than the actual motion, but toilets for women is probably just taking it a little too far, and I ask you to bring the member back to the motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): I do understand that the member on her feet was talking about the evolution of the process of standing orders. A number of speakers on both sides have been talking about the standing orders.

Roma Britnell interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Member for South-West Coast, I did not say that. The member for Cranbourne to continue and make sure she references her contributions to the procedural motion at hand.

Pauline RICHARDS: On the procedural motion, as I was saying, there are quite a lot of copies, often, of the notice paper that are left there at the beginning of the day, and they do not all get used up, and that is because people do not always understand clearly what is going to be happening as the day progresses. Having this new sessional order will allow a lot more clarity, and I am looking forward to this pile of green notice papers diminishing quickly at the beginning of the day, because you will find all sorts of important information in here that really help with the running of the day and really help me undertake my role as the whip.

I do want to comment on the contribution from the member for Greenvale. I do not think I have heard quite so many metaphors used, and I thought that he was mixing one. There was a bit of a poking of a stick at the end of the tunnel; I thought he was mixing his metaphors there. But I was very grateful to the member for Greenvale for really taking us back to why we have the Parliament that we have and the importance of the roles that we have. He spoke about his role as the member for Greenvale. I often speak about the importance of the role I have representing the Cranbourne community. There are people all across this chamber representing their own communities, and it just so happens that after the last election, when there were some extraordinary claims made about vaccinations – claims that were canvassed by the member for Evelyn, as she spoke about the previous Premier being referred to as a ‘dictator’ – the result of that conversation was that people made a determination about who they thought would represent them best in their communities. What that gives people an opportunity to do is to debate the motions that are in front of them and are put on the notice paper as they respond to their needs and what our community is looking forward to us focusing on. Other motions on the paper that I know we are looking at are things like cost of living and the impact of breakfast clubs and the school saving bonus.

These notices of motion are going to be so much clearer for people to understand because of this commonsense approach that we are taking to update the sessional orders, just as the sessional orders have been updated so that I longer need to duel somebody because I disagree with them and I do not need to wear a hat or in fact be a man to stand here, to be elected. As all of those evolutions have happened, we are a better place. We are a better workplace, and we represent our community in a much more fulsome and accurate way. This motion is incredibly important to continue that. I commend the motion, and I look forward to hearing further contributions.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (18:25): I also rise to make a contribution to this motion before the house, which wants to make changes to sessional orders. Basically this will give the house

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1230

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

the ability to suspend debate, and this is a change that has gone through without going through the Standing Orders Committee, which is something we have never seen before. I think what this motion is doing is ignoring that over time the parliamentary rules have been developed for reasons, reasons that are keeping the balance of power and making sure people have the ability to debate and contribute.

This sessional order really does I think show the obsession of this current Labor government, which over the last 10 years has been obsessed with power and control. We have seen that over and again with the way they gag people here in this chamber, as we see when we are not able to debate; things get guillotined and there are no opportunities. We have also seen it out in the community. A recent example was with the debate around turning the different hospitals into health hubs around the state and the government saying to the CEOs and the board members, 'If you speak out against us, you'll lose your job.' I have seen many examples in South-West Coast of that sort of bullying behaviour, where the government, working through their lines of who is in charge down through the ranks, is actually putting pressure on community organisations, saying, 'If you speak up or you speak to the opposition, you will not get the opportunity to get funding for projects.'

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a procedural motion around sessional orders, and we are hearing about bullying in South-West Coast. I am not sure what the relevance is.

Roma BRITNELL: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, your ruling specifically said that we are able to talk about wideranging debates because other people have talked about very wideranging issues, and I am talking about the sessional orders eroding the ability for people to actually have a debate and freedom of speech and time to do that. I think it is very relevant.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): I believe you are verballing me when you say that that was my ruling. That was not my ruling. However, I do accept that –

Roma Britnell interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Member for South-West Coast, what I said is that various members have raised procedural points about how standing orders have been addressed in the past and how they applied to the current sessional orders under debate, and I am happy for you to continue with that framework in mind.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I believe I was called a disgrace by the member over there, and I would like that to be withdrawn.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): I ask the member for Point Cook to withdraw.

Mathew Hilakari: I withdraw.

Roma BRITNELL: This is a motion, as I was saying, that will erode the democratic process that this Parliament has had in place for a very long time, and it will further erode the ability for people to discuss important legislation. The Minister for Health in her contribution actually stated that the government have been getting on with dealing with what Victoria needs – that was what she said. But clearly we are here tonight because they have not been getting on with what Victoria needs. The debate on the bail laws that is going on in the upper house tonight is why we are actually here, because this government did not put the work in. The committee is taking a lot of time to debate the bill because the work was not done.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, we are straying away from this tight procedural motion. I do not understand why we are discussing what is going on in the other chamber when we are having a procedural motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): There is no point of order on this matter. However, the time for me to interrupt business has arrived. I will suspend the sitting for 1 hour for a dinner break.

Sitting suspended 6:30 pm until 7:31 pm.

Roma BRITNELL: As I was saying before the dinner break, Acting Speaker Edbrooke – which you were not able to hear, because you were not in the chair – this is the first time we have seen a motion that changes the sessional orders that has not gone through the Standing Orders Committee. It is unprecedented. This is what we have seen of this government that is looking to detract the ability for debate to occur. They want to be able to cease debating legislation and bring in motions so that they can absolutely detract from the situation where they actually have very little legislation that they are bringing into this Parliament to address through legislation the challenges that we are seeing throughout Victoria. But this is not a new situation. This is a Parliament that really does not want to see debate. The government believe that they have the ability to make the decisions without being here in the Parliament. That is why we see them gag debate, which I spoke about before the dinner break.

I have been here 10 years this year, and as the member for Gippsland South brought up in his contribution, in our time we have only ever had the ability to go into consideration in detail, to really thoroughly debate legislation through that stage, three times because the government does not want us to have the ability to scrutinise them. That is what opposition is for – to hold the government to account. Ministers should be held to account. This is public money that they are spending, wasting, bingeing on projects that are bleeding money, running late and probably funding, as I said this morning, their CFMEU mates as well. So changing the sessional orders to give the government the ability to put on motions so that we have less time to debate legislation is actually no surprise. This is a government that does not want the standards to be maintained. They like to see the standards change. The creep that goes on to get less and less democracy and more and more dictatorial processes in place so they can control and wield the power they think will actually keep Victorians under control. But Victorians have had enough. We have seen this over the last 10 years of this lazy government that just want to make it their way or the highway.

We have the Standing Orders Committee, which is the committee sessional orders would normally be put through for changes to occur, which has not happened in this case. Standing orders actually do matter, because they are the longstanding rules that govern how the Parliament runs. That might be technical and dry, but it is very important. These changes that we are seeing today, which the government are putting forward through this motion, show that the Labor government does not care about the processes of Parliament but would rather be authoritarian. It is probably no surprise to any of us on this side of the house that this is a government that just want to change things to make it easier for them to waste time, because really they are a government that just want a political audience so that they can roll out more spin to keep people believing that what they have been conning Victorians about through their spin for the last 10 years is actually real.

I think, as we are all seeing every single day when we wake up now, that the chickens are coming home to roost and the cracks are quite wide now in the spin stories. What people have been hoping – that this government has been looking after the Victorian budget – has absolutely been laid bare for all to see. We have got major financial problems in the state of Victoria. ‘The state is broke’ is what has been said by many, and when you cannot drive on a road that has not got massive cracks, potholes or shoulders that crumble away – roads that are so dangerous that there is not a person, particularly in regional Victoria, that is not worried sick about the safety that they see as compromised for their family trying to get home from work or going to take their kids to school – this is a government that has failed so drastically. It is a real shame to see that the legislative program is so light when there are so many areas that could be fixed – areas like the health system, the mental health system, the education system and the roads, as I have said. There is not probably a portfolio area that is not actually failing under the Allan Labor government.

Unfortunately, that is what we will continue to see more of, because they do not even address and see the ill of their ways. They just continually barrel on down the same pathway of borrow and binge and waste. Unfortunately, under this, Victorians are struggling. The cost of living is rising. The energy costs are going up. Families are paying more for their groceries – 30 per cent more we heard last week – and they just continue to come after Victorians' taxes through reaching into the pockets of good hardworking families. Things will have to change before too long, and in two years they will change.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (19:37): I think it is a little curious that they are talking a lot, the opposition, about spin. The free dental program, Smile Squad – is that spin, or are we actually helping kids to get free dental care? Is not that an equaliser? What about the free glasses program? As somebody who has had glasses since about grade 3, I can tell you what, I would not be able to read what is in front of me without them. I can barely read my writing anyway; it is terrible. But coming back to the point, I am so grateful that we are delivering that program. So is that spin? No, actually it is being delivered. So I am wondering what she is referring to. What about the free breakfast program that has been rolled out across the state? Is that spin? No, it is actually happening, because we know our members have visited schools and actually seen kids getting healthy breakfasts.

They were talking about, 'Oh, nothing's working.' What about the acceleration of the phonics program? Let me tell you, parents are feeding back to me and others exactly what that means. It is a real game changer, and particularly for those who might have come from families where there has been extreme disadvantage et cetera it means that we can offset whatever challenges or otherwise may be at home, or they may have other learning challenges et cetera. This is a great equaliser, but that is actually being accelerated. It is actually happening, not spin. What about our free kinder program? That has been rolled out as well, and –

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it is nearly 2 minutes into the debate on this motion and the motion has not been referred to once, so I ask you to bring the member back to the motion at hand.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): Member for South-West Coast, it has been a wideranging debate on this, but I will remind members that they are to stick to the motion at hand.

Nina TAYLOR: I thank you, Acting Speaker, very much for reminding me of that very important point, and I will say that I was simply rebutting points that were made by the opposition, which I think is certainly at the discretion of members of the chamber to do. In any case, I shall proceed. We know that this motion is administrative in nature, but it does not in any way resile from the importance of standing orders, which is another proposition that has been put forward rather incorrectly, I would say, by the opposition. The other thing that I did take exception to was that we were just shovelling these changes through when in fact actually I can see cameras all over the chamber. This is actually being live streamed, and the only way that we would be cutting through the democratic process, which we are actually partaking in here as we speak, is if perhaps I was to stand under the desk and not be visible to the cameras, although I think the microphone might still pick up what I am actually proffering or what I am putting forward to the chamber. I think that the fact of being in this house and having every single word that we put forward to the chamber recorded attests to the fact that we are not resiling from democratic processes, we are actually undertaking a democratic process as we speak and actually having a debate on this issue.

Roma Britnell: We are only 10 minutes into the resumption of this motion, and the Labor government, who put this motion forward, have not even had the decency to keep a quorum in the room for 10 minutes. I call the state of the house to the attention of the Acting Speaker.

Quorum formed.

Nina TAYLOR: I know that those opposite have claimed that by the mere putting forward of this motion to the house we are sliding into a dictatorship. I would say that is a slight, if not significant,

embellishment and in fact a gross exaggeration. In fact I would say it is a furphy. I am pretty confident in putting that point forward. I would suggest that I am absolutely confident we will get through this motion and democracy will continue for the sitting weeks to follow. I am very confident in that. I want to reassure those opposite that a dictatorship is certainly not inherent or underpinning the motion that we have before the house. But I know that they are deeply frightened of this, so I want to allay their fears, because they might not be able to sleep at night at the thought of such a dreadful outcome and we cannot have that. Please rest assured that democracy is strong and we respect it – hence we are having this debate in the house at this moment.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Exactly. I did hear some contentions about the fact that we are not debating on issues that Victorians care about. Well, I actually had a look through the motions that are already on the notice paper. As has been stated many times in this chamber, they are things that we care about because we know our communities care about these issues, such as the cost of living, energy, the school breakfast program, health matters and protections for renters. Maybe those opposite do not care about these issues, but I know our communities, if I can speak for members of the government, certainly do, so these are a number of the issues that we put forward for debate.

If we are going to look at quid pro quo on this issue, I also had a look at a number of the motions of the opposition. They were suggesting that all of our motions are sledge motions. Have they looked at their own motions? I mean, they should review them, because there was plenty of sledging in there, let me tell you. There is a lot of sledging in there. Well, they are giving it a good crack. And I am not saying they should or they should not, but I am just suggesting that it is important to have some objectivity. I understand we all have our value positions and they may not actually like some of the motions that we are speaking to and vice versa. I absolutely respect that. But to suggest that we are diminishing democracy and that the nature of the matters that are being brought forward in the motions does not reflect the will of the community, well, I take exception to that. Whether it is energy, whether it is cost of living, whether it is school breakfasts, whether it is health, whether it is protections for renters – and I could go on – I am very confident that there is many a member of the community across our great state of Victoria that does care about these issues. I think we can rest assured that this Parliament will continue, with the goodwill of all those in the chamber, to prosecute matters that are important to Victorians.

Another thing they said was, ‘You’re not dealing with the matters that are important, like crime.’ Actually, it was about an hour or two ago that I was watching the Minister for Corrections, if I can be absolutely accurate on that point, carrying through the committee stage of the Bail Amendment (Tough Bail) Bill 2025. So if we are talking about subject matter, that is certainly critical subject matter, and hence it is being appropriately debated in the committee stage in the upper house.

It was put forward by the opposition also that, ‘Oh, it’s a long committee stage,’ so therefore somehow this reflects on the legislation that is being put before the house. I can say, as somebody who was a whip in the upper house, that I saw many a committee stage, which was often protracted because that is democracy, because that gives everyone – all the opposition and the crossbench – the opportunity to ask any question that they see fit. So I do not know whether the opposition actually want us to reduce the committee stage and reduce the capacity of the crossbench to ask the questions that they want. Was that the inference? I found it very confusing, because I actually think it is an important pillar of democracy that they do have the committee stage in the upper house.

The opposition might want to clarify whether they want to reduce the committee stage because somehow that implies that there is a better bill or a better outcome or whether they will continue to allow their members in the upper house and the crossbench the opportunity that they, I would have thought, certainly under democratic principles, are entitled to have to cross-examine the bills in the committee stage in the upper house. So I was a little perplexed by that proposition, because on the one

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1234

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

hand here they are saying, ‘We’re sliding into a dictatorship,’ but then on the other hand they want to reduce the committee stage in the upper house. Do you see the contradiction? It is very confusing.

In any case, rest assured that on this side of house we are absolutely committed to democracy; we are absolutely committed to the issues that are impacting Victorians day in, day out, across the spectrum of matters that impact the great Victorians of our state, and, you know, that is fine. I know that the member for Brighton suggested that we had the worst standing orders in the country; the only thing was, he did not substantiate the point. It was just a really, really, really strong opinion, and he is entitled to have that opinion, but a really, really, really strong opinion is not going to cut it. On that note I commend the motion.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:47): You know what, I enjoy the member for Albert Park and the member for Pascoe Vale, because I reckon they are the only two who speak faster than me, and I do not knock them for it. I get it. You want to get a lot out; I get it. I know that feeling too, and I can speak quickly, but I will not, because I have got to fill 10 minutes. As a consequence I will speak slowly. Like a press conference from a former federal Liberal leader, I will speak slowly so you absorb it and understand what I am saying.

The member for Albert Park said free dental, Smile Squad, breakfasts, all kinds of stuff. That is great, and I would just simply say that if those things are very important and those things are a priority, with respect, let us debate them; let us put those things on the notice paper and talk about matters that are important to the Victorian community. I mean, the government is very proud of them; every government is proud of what they do, I am sure. Instead we are debating notice 4, which is about giving precedence to sticking government notices at the top of the notice paper, so they can come in and move, effectively, sledge motions – a procedural motion. Why are we debating a procedural motion? What I cannot understand is: usually, and the member for Brighton said this very eloquently, when we are going to make these –

A member interjected.

Matthew GUY: He did. You should listen more to him. He is very good on his feet.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: I take the vocal support for the member for Brighton’s contribution, because I supported his contribution very much.

A member interjected.

Matthew GUY: Listen. Слухай, in Ukrainian – слухай. The point is: why didn’t the Leader of the House have a conversation with the Manager of Opposition Business in the week before, like is usually done? I think the member for Eildon would know this; it is usually Thursday or Friday that you have this conversation, and you come in and you say, ‘Listen, next week we’re going to do this, we’re going to do this and we’re going to do this. No worries. And these are the bills we’re going to debate. No worries.’ And what we found was there was this glaring hole for Wednesday. We were told at shadow cabinet, ‘There’s a glaring hole for Wednesday.’ Sure enough, there was a glaring hole for Wednesday. Now we are debating at night. We knew the Greens, who are nuts, would debate a motion on bail.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Well, they are odd – all kinds of buskers, odd bods, failed artists, all kinds of people who join the Greens. We knew that we would be debating after dinner a thing on bail. We have come to this chamber four times trying to strengthen bail. We are more than happy to strengthen bail. We do not think this goes anywhere near it, but that is another discussion.

The point is: why wasn’t this discussed with the opposition? That is why a number of speakers on our side are coming up and saying, ‘This is utterly disingenuous.’ If you want to change the sessional orders – and they are Labor’s sessional orders; let us not forget that – we are 60 per cent of the way

through this term, and if it is so urgent, as the member for Eildon and I were discussing, that we have got to debate this, you would think that if it was such a good idea and the light bulb of good ideas went on in the member for Macedon's head in December 2022, it would have been debated then. It would have been part of the sessional orders then. Okay, no worries. The government have got a majority – fair point. But now we are 60 per cent of the way through the term, and we are told, 'Oh no, we need to prioritise these government motions', which have no substance.

The member for Albert Park actually made some decent points in terms of policy. She mentioned a whole range of issues in relation to policy. Fine, let us talk about policy. But we are not talking about those matters. She made some reasonable points. I would throw in the CFMEU. I would throw in the economy. I would throw in the crime stats that were released today. I would throw in housing targets, which we have all noted the government has not mentioned once in two weeks of question time. This is the biggest issue of the day, remember – not mentioned once in two weeks. Why aren't we debating that? But no, we have got this sessional order notice of motion 4, about which the member for Macedon has come in and said, 'This is the most important thing for us to be talking about.' People on our side are treating this with a point of disdain. There must be something disingenuous about this, because if it was so important it would have been done at the start of the term with the sessional orders.

Those in this chamber would know that after an election you default to the standing orders, and then in the first few weeks in the next year you have a debate on the sessional orders to improve the flow of the year. We are not Luddites. We are not saying that you do not ever improve on the sessional orders. I understand that. But it just seems a little odd that 60 per cent-plus of the way through the term you are coming back to the chamber, but not to say that we need to prioritise legislation. If this was a motion to somehow prioritise legislation that might deal with what we have just been talking about this week, which is bail, or what we might talk about, which is a fire services property amendment or taxation or something else, then I would get the debate. I would understand it. We might have a different point of view on how it is conducted and how we vote, I get that, but I would get the context of the debate, which is that we must change the sessional orders to facilitate this legislation, because that is clearly what the government needs to do to put this legislation in place – got it. No.

I say it again – for the third time. We are coming into the chamber at 10 to 8 at night – and I know we are sitting late because of issues in the Legislative Council; that is okay, we will pass those laws – but the point is: why are we doing this over something self-confessed by the government as so minor? They are not my words. Literally every speaker that has come before me from the government side has got up and said, 'This is so minor. Why are we debating it?' I would argue the same. The government is selling the argument for us. It is so minor. So why wasn't it done in the sessional orders in February 2023 when we came back for the first session? Did the light bulb really take 2½ years to go on in the member for Macedon's head that this might be an important idea? Really? I do not think so. I do not know her that well, but I do not think the light bulb took that long to come on. That is why we think that this must be just an idea of popping in sledge motions leading up to an election, which is really just a waste of this Parliament's time.

It has been self-confessed by the Labor Party, as literally every speaker before me has said, 'Look what we've done', and they have reeled off a whole bunch of achievements for their decade in office. Good, bad or indifferent, they have listed those achievements. All right, no worries. Well, why don't you come and debate those? Let us debate the economy. Let us debate the government's plan, supposedly, to lower debt. Let us debate the government's plan to build 80,000 homes each and every year for 10 years. The member for Narracan and I have noted that they have not talked about that for two weeks in question time – the biggest issue of the day, remember; the biggest issue of the year. It is not notice of motion 4, which talks about:

So much of standing orders 146, 148(1) and 150 are suspended to allow, on days on which government business has precedence, ministers to list government notices of motion ...

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1236

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

I would use very different language if I was back at Montmorency High. The best I can come up with is – I am trying to be polite – that I do not believe it. I think it is not real. I am not going to swear, because I cannot put it on Instagram if I do. I would say it in Ukrainian, but someone will go and interpret it, and I will be in Backroom Baz.

The point is it is just ridiculous that this is our priority. I use as evidence for my 10 minutes of contribution on this motion the Labor Party's own speakers, who have got up and talked about a myriad of their decade-of-office achievements. Well, let us talk about those. I just say that, if that is the biggest issue of the day, we would hold up the chamber, the Legislative Assembly in the Parliament of Victoria, to talk about this matter for the best part of a few hours. I would say how can the Parliament be wasting its time on something like this when if you wanted to do it, you could have told the Manager of Opposition Business on Thursday or Friday last week, 'This is what it is and this is what it is about. Can you please facilitate it?' The member for Evelyn is a pretty reasonable person. She would have had that conversation and would have brought it. The shadow cabinet would have had a discussion here and there, and it would probably go through. We would have a conversation or one or the other. Instead no-one was told, I understand, till Tuesday: 'Don't tell them. It's a big state secret' – this is how the government operates. 'It's cabinet in confidence. Sign a confidentiality agreement' – all this kind of crap they do. It is a motion just to bring on sledge motions.

I guess in the 20 seconds left I will say when those motions come, we will refer to all these speeches we are making tonight. I would have thought the Parliament of Victoria is worth a little bit more than this kind of crap, because it is actually worth more discussing issues of what the government themselves have actually come out and said we should be discussing. They are matters around the economy, crime, law and order and the state and future of Victoria under this government.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): I remind members about their speech. Also the member for Bulleen broke a promise to the Acting Speaker. He said he was going to speak slowly.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (19:57): It is actually against the standing orders to speak in another language – just for the member for Bulleen. But I will give it a go if I do not get a point of order. Adesso io parlo qui nel Parlamento di Victoria. Eccola. Basta così. No swearing, I promise. There are translators aplenty, I am sure, on all sides of the chamber who can guarantee that I was very parliamentary in my language just then, unlike the member for Bulleen, who did drop a word that I would not have accepted in my classroom back in the day. I have to say it is always entertaining listening to the member for Bulleen, and often I do not get to follow the leader-in-waiting, once again. It is always entertaining. I listened with great anticipation. I thought this might give me a bit of material to dovetail off as well, and it certainly did.

Quite seriously, if you will indulge me, I am being very serious at this point in time, because the member for Preston referred to the tragedy in Macedonia. I actually, given I am following the member for Bulleen, wanted to take the opportunity to express my utter and complete support for the people of Ukraine. I believe that photo we held the other day here was a wonderful moment of solidarity across houses and across parties, and long may that continue, because that is when we are all at our absolute best. I would like to put that here.

Getting back to the substance of the member for Bulleen's contribution, I am trying to understand how this is possibly a sledge motion when it is a minor administrative change. One would think that Henny Penny was around clucking that the sky is going to fall in because we are trying to make a simple change here to basically improve the functionality of this Parliament.

I would like to go into a little bit of history because the inner history teacher is always ready to burst forth, and I was very inspired by the member for Greenvale's contribution earlier, with a wonderful exploration and exposition of some of the history that preceded us long before in the Westminster parliamentary system. It is interesting to note that, amongst all the Commonwealth countries where our systems have evolved from the one parliamentary system, each and every one of our systems has

its own nuance and is quite different. I am wondering if anyone is even aware that the Isle of Man is not unicameral or bicameral; it is a tricameral system of parliament. I did not even know that that was a thing. So there we go; we have all learned something there. But the point I am trying to make is that parliaments evolve; processes and procedures evolve. And they need to; they modernise.

I actually have a copy here of the original standing orders of the Victorian Parliament. It is not a prop because it is a piece of information completely relevant to this house. In 1858 this was printed. It is quite interesting comparing and contrasting the standing orders of 1858 to our modern standing orders. I did want to just highlight a few of the interesting things in there. When presenting petitions back in the day, they had to be in writing – that is fine. They also had to contain a prayer at the end. There you go, who would have thought that a petition needed to have a prayer at the end. But it did. It needed to be signed on the same skin or sheet. Now I am going to come to the skin part, because all legislation in the Victorian Parliament at that time – and I am yet to uncover when it changed – and still today in Westminster had to be printed on vellum. For those who might not know what vellum actually is, it is animal skin. Every piece of legislation was printed on animal skin and stored. I can only presume that it held better than paper. Thankfully modern-day practices here in the Victorian Parliament have stopped with the use of animal skin. I know that my friend in the other place the member of the Animal Justice Party is quite delighted by the fact that that is no longer the practice here, as I am sure many of the other members here are also delighted that we no longer need animal hide to record our legislation. But interestingly they still do in the United Kingdom.

There was some wailing and gnashing of teeth earlier about this motion, in particular from the member for Brighton, unsurprisingly, claiming that the standing orders mean nothing anymore and this has descended into a cursory document. I mean, talk about hyperbolic – honestly. It is just another case of if everything is a 10 out of 10, then nothing ever is. What an overreaction. Then, contrasting with that, the member for Bulleen was basically saying that this was not worth debating. So I am not sure that they have got their minds consistent on that side of the chamber, because we have one side saying that this is terrible and decrying our motion here, and another one saying it is not even worth the time to debate it. It would be wonderful to find out where exactly the opposition falls on this, because I am a bit confused. I do not know about anyone else.

This is quite interesting, and I do actually want to address something when it comes to the standing orders having been changed in the past by those opposite when they had carriage, because it is a bit rich for them to talk about sessional order changes needing to go to the Standing Orders Committee when their own people forced a significant change to the sessional orders in the other place not just once but twice, and both times it had unintended consequences. They were warned when they first proposed short-form documents motions that they would run into timing issues in the afternoon on a Wednesday, but apparently they did not take that counsel on board. Lo and behold, week after week after week there were timing issues. So they rushed another change to sessional orders which meant the government could also propose documents motions. Well, they were surprised when they realised what they had done. We warned them that they should put such a significant change to the sessional orders through the Procedure Committee, but they ploughed ahead and they made a mince of it. They then had to waste Parliament's time for a third attempt – they say third time lucky – to get their business in order. Now the Parliament staff have to suffer because there is no dinner break. I think the staff at this place deserve better. I would imagine that my comrades here agree. In fact I would hope that everyone here agrees. I am just going to say, once again, it is a little bit rich to hear the bleating from those opposite when their own track record is fairly poor form.

It has been quite interesting, this debate. I have to say when I first looked at it I thought this could be a bit dry, and there are quite a few people speaking on it, but I think it has been one of the more entertaining ones we have had in a long time. Maybe we can put that down to us being still here later than usual for us, especially on a Thursday, and maybe getting a little bit, I do not know, too jolly with staying on late. It is like the adrenaline rush when you are going out at night. You think, 'Oh, this is exciting,' so you get a bit fired up, more than you often would. People have definitely been fired up

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1238

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

on this one, and who would have thunk it? I am not a betting person, but if someone had said that this might be one of the more entertaining debates for the week, I would have said no way. Lo and behold, I would have been proven wrong.

I am just going to repeat into *Hansard* what is being sought:

So much of standing orders 146, 148(1) and 150 are suspended to allow, on days on which government business has precedence, ministers to list government notices of motion and orders of the day at the head of the list on the notice paper in whatever order they wish. Government notices and orders are then dealt with in the order they are listed on the notice paper.

How can anyone take umbrage at that? It gives clarity, it makes things more precise and it gives us all a reasonable expectation of what is going to follow that day. I would have thought the opposition would be delighted at that. Instead they are having conniptions and apoplexies and falling apart. They are discombobulated. I am trying to think of other great words. I just like to put some nice things –

Matthew Guy interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: In Italian again? I do not know that I can, because I may stray into territory that might be unparliamentary. No, I will not say it in Italian. I will remain within the standing orders and keep it all in English, but I can tell you in Italian later outside of the chamber, if you like.

In all honesty, this is really a minor administrative change that is being sought. It really should not be causing the consternation that it has been causing, which feels very performative, one has to say. Once again, I will challenge the inconsistency of the message coming from the member for Brighton and the member for Bulleen. I think they should probably caucus, as we tend to do, and at least get their arguments in line with each other, because that makes for a much more coherent and cogent argument. Then we can understand where we are going. But it feels like it is just flying in a thousand different directions out into the ether. Maybe that is what happens when the Legislative Assembly is sitting at 8 o'clock at night. I commend it to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (20:07): As I have listened to the contributions particularly from the other side, it has stunned me, really, that they do not know how this Parliament operates. They do not understand the difference between the standing orders and the sessional orders, and that was very clear from the last speaker. The standing orders are much more longstanding. As the member for Bulleen said, when a new Parliament commences, the government have a look at the sessional orders and decide what they are going to bring in for that Parliament. We hear people saying, 'This evolves. These are not permanent. These are sessional orders. They are not evolving to permanent standing orders.' I think that you are not really understanding that, and it is really quite scary to me that people have been here for so long and really do not understand how the process works.

I do recall one Parliament – not the last one, I think it was the one before that, maybe the 58th – where the government changed the sessional orders so question time was not at 2 o'clock, it was at 11 am. We thought at the time, 'Gosh, ministers aren't going to like that. It's not going to give them any preparation for the day.' And guess what, for the next Parliament it changed back because the sessional orders are for that session of Parliament only. We are well over 50 per cent – I think we just calculated we are over 59 per cent – of the way through this term of this Parliament, and the government have all of a sudden decided we need to change the sessional orders. But what reasons could they give us? They could not give us any reasons. It is a little bit scary to say, 'We're doing it because we've got the numbers. We're the government.' That is very much about power and control. This is a haphazard way of running its business. It is not going to make the chamber run more smoothly. I do not think it will make the chamber run more smoothly.

The Parliament is here to hold the executive to account. We need to have the role to be able to do that. The government is flying in the face of everything that has been there. I will draw the house's attention

to the minutes of the house, *Votes and Proceedings*, from 21, 22 and 23 February 2023. It talks about the Standing Orders Committee, and it says here:

A select committee be appointed to consider and report upon the standing orders and practices of the House ...

For me that is a very clear indication that these changes to the sessional orders should first of all have gone, with the government's intent when they started Parliament, to the Standing Orders Committee. I have been part of standing orders; I understand what happens and how you do it. Now there are new members on the Standing Orders Committee, and a couple of those members have not been to any meetings. I believe the last Standing Orders Committee meeting was in December last year, and this was not raised. The government did not have it on their radar then, it was not vitally important that they change it. But now they find themselves in a bit of a pickle, because I think they are finding themselves a little bit light on the legislative program. This gives them a couple of outs here. When the minister yesterday was introducing motions about this motion, for a minute I thought they might actually have listened to the Greens, who for a long time have wanted the sessional orders to look at non-government business. I thought, 'Gosh, maybe they're going to make something like that to appease the Greens.' They probably owe the Greens quite a bit, so I thought maybe they were going to do that. But, no, we see that they want to change the sessional order to allow them to kind of determine the program of the day how they want, not what is set out in the standing orders and not where the motions are done at the start of the day. They will just do this at any old time.

The way it will work is that the night before it will be printed, what will be happening for the day, and the government will have to put down in order what is going to go on. I bet on more than one occasion there has been a bad news story about to break. It might be about the Auditor-General, the \$12 billion blowout that the government said, 'Oh, gosh, that was shoddy methodology from the Auditor-General', and they did not believe the \$12 billion blowout. It might be another scandal around the Commonwealth Games or the CFMEU rorting, the breaking stories by Nick McKenzie. They might get a heads-up the night before that this is going to happen, and so they need a plan B, they need something to take away from the program, they need to start a sledge motion.

Belinda Wilson: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would like to bring the member back to the motion, on relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Succinctly. I will take that on relevance.

Cindy McLEISH: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, yes, I think that was on relevance. This is entirely relevant, because I was pointing out the sorts of things that are the consequences of the change to the sessional orders, what it means in practicality as we play it out in the Parliament, and I think that is what I am supposed to do, and again that just shows me that those opposite really do not understand the way the house works.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The debate has been rather wide from the words on the notice paper, and the member was as close as many.

Cindy McLEISH: This is what can happen, because when the government have parked a number of sledge motions on the paper, they realise they have got a backup plan, because if there is some bad news breaking, the night before, when they put that program together, they will think, 'How can we deflect that bad news? What are we going to do? Let's see if we can find something that is going to try and take away from all of these bad things that are going on.' That is one consequence that they can have. It is a gap filler, because sometimes you can tell – they have got to have a lot of speakers sometimes – and by the end of it they have exhausted everyone's contributions. People are making stuff up because they have been asked to speak at the last minute. So this is a bit of a gap filler – again, using a gap filler as a sledge motion. When I thought about this, what I would have liked to have seen with the changes to the sessional orders, whatever order that they want about these motions, I have got motions on the paper, and there are some motions that I would not mind talking about – 42 and 44, for example. I would be more than happy for the government, if they want to introduce motions like this,

not just to give them carte blanche to do what they like, but I would rather see that on a rotational basis in the same way that proportionality is there with members statements, that you might get four of your motions up, then we get two of ours up, then the Greens might get one. I would have liked to have seen a little bit more democracy in the way that you put the order of business to make it fair. This is not about balance and fairness, as the government might think, because we certainly do not think that at all.

I think the government are in a bit of strife, and they are looking at what they can do. They have had the previous two terms of Parliament; the government know how these things play out. But they have got in a pickle this time, and they have thought, 'We need to do something different. What is it that I can do to give us that flexibility when we have got a bad news story breaking, when our legislative program's a bit light, when our backbenchers are starting to make contributions that make no sense because they're being asked to fill in at the last minute?' The government needs something, a bit of a get-out-of-jail-free card. I think this is why the government have introduced this now.

As I said, I would much rather have seen a process where, if you are going to have these debated, it is proportional, like with our questions at question time, with the adjournment matters and constituency questions and with the members statements, with that allocation. I will tell you, we have got a load of motions on the papers that we would love to have debated. The way it is at the minute, the government want to curtail debate on legislation, if they have got enough legislation coming forward, to just push their burrow and not have us be able to hold them to account.

There are so many things to hold this government to account, with all of the dodginess on the Big Build projects and their treatment of women in construction, the police having to find \$2 billion worth of savings over the forwards – give me a break. There are so many things that we could be debating as motions that we would like to bring on, but this very much curtails the debates that can happen. The government think they have the power to do what they want and are treating the Parliament with absolute disrespect.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (20:17): It is a pleasure to rise at this early hour to speak on this motion and to join you, Deputy Speaker. While hundreds of thousands are tuning into the game of the night down the road at the MCG, there are still tens of thousands that are tuning into this stellar debate on this motion. I think it is a bit misunderstood.

I will say one thing: I am honoured to be joined in this chamber at this late hour by none other than the Leader of the Nationals, who has turned up for this one; the former outstanding Leader of the Liberal Party the member for Bulleen; the in-waiting Leader of the Liberal Party the member for Nepean; and the parliamentary secretary to the opposition leader. We have the heavy hitters who do not rock up during bill speeches, but we have got them out here tonight on a motion that they have demonised and torn down.

I want to put a case forward to the opposition that you have misunderstood this. This is in the interests of the opposition. We have actually got your back. I will take you through why we have got your back. There have been discussions around dictators coming back. There have been overthrows of Parliament. There has been a lot of egg put into this pie. I will say that I think you have misunderstood this. This procedural motion under the current rules changes the motions so they are allowed to be dealt with in any particular order. I thought, 'Oh, that's exciting.' The member for Eildon gave me a bit of inspiration while I was feverishly prepping for this speech and this contribution. I thought there might be an occasion that the government brings on notices of motion a little bit earlier in the day just out of the goodness of our work through the Parliament. I love some of these notices of motion that we could get to a bit sooner. You know these absolute humdingers around the Suburban Rail Loop. We had about 200 of those notices of motion put forward. The SEC was put forward. Imagine if we could get to the intellect on these motions that are all the same. I remember when the shadow cabinet said, 'You know what's going to really wind the government up this week? Let's all put these same notices of motion with no intellectual thought other than to change electorate names slightly.' We

could have an opportunity to bring those debates on a bit sooner. I have gone through them, and it just keeps going. Look at this: the ideological gas ban – ‘bas gan’, the member for Eildon once called it – going through. We have got Redbridge polling. We have got all these wonderful things that the Manager of Opposition Business said were so critical to their opposition and to their discussion and debate.

Well, just think, if we are able to put these in the order that we determine, with the member for Evelyn and the member for Macedon leading their respective parties and the operation of the house, we might be able to get to these motions a bit sooner in the day. We might be able to bring it on a bit sooner. We might give them an opportunity to have a chat on some of these motions – and I am a bit disappointed that this year we had just a feverish flow of notices of motion. Do you remember them? Sometimes we would get to members statements by adjournment time, it would be so long – they would just sail out. They were not really intellectually stimulating; they were all very much the same. But then they just sort of dried up. They have just sort of given up on this as a tactic.

I think, bring back the pointless notices of motion. Bring it all back. Next sitting week – Shadow Assistant Minister to the Leader of the Opposition, if you are taking minutes – get it back. Let us bring it back. Let us have another 300 notices of motion on random policies that you all put forward, and then you might just have a hope, because at the moment the procedural limitations on this mean we do not get to it straightaway. We could dream to get there a bit sooner, because at the moment we have a situation where government business motions have to be given a day’s notice. All this whole, ‘Oh, democracy is overthrown’ – I mean, give me a spell; 99 per cent of the team over there do not really read the notice papers. Let us be honest. Let us call it out. How many actually check it when rolling in? The member for Bulleen might have a go, and I definitely know that the Leader of the Nationals has a go. I have seen the Leader of the Nationals audit Public Accounts and Estimates Committee reports down to the absolute centimetre. So I think that there are some over that side that do the work. But most would not have an absolute clue what goes on until they get the look-up, probably from the member for Brighton, and then have some sort of sense on where the day goes.

So do not give us this whole, ‘Oh, we might not. We’ll take it away.’ I would put to you that they would not have a clue what is going on in the day, because most of the time we do not have anyone on that side contributing to bills after question time. We are sort of looking around, and they say, ‘Oh, give us a chance; we want to have a go.’ We have gone through the statistical reference. There are some on that side who would not know a bill speech if it fell on them. They would not have a clue. And if shadow cabinet does not give them something to talk about, they do not speak on anything. There are some that have not spoken on things for 18 months. So the notion that their democracy and their representation is being curtailed and taken away is just garbage. It is absolute rubbish.

But I put the contention forward that the actual combining of this, and the practical implications, means that some of the frivolous procedural debates that sometimes pop up when the enthusiasm comes forward to contest a particular movement of the house are actually the practicality to this. So when you have the government notices on the paper and you need to move them through, it creates a line in the sand on a Thursday, where the member for Brighton will come in and to his credit go, ‘You know what, I’m going to burn 30 minutes here. I’ll get a bit of air time, I’ll put it on the socials. I’ll have a whack at the government.’ That is what it is really about. That is what really happens in practical terms. It effectively combines the notices with the bills into one sequence and says that is government business.

How that is suggested to have curtailed democracy to the likes of authoritarian regimes, which the member for Evelyn described as a dictatorship – I mean, there is trying to have a sledge and then there is just being absolutely ridiculous to the point of ridicule. And then the member for Greenvale just went through, case in point, in the most eloquent way, how credibility on things like this just falls to pieces. At least the member for Brighton had a bit of a chat around how in his day he drafted all of the Canberra standing orders. I mean, I have never seen a ‘Toot, toot, look at me’ performance like that before. Step aside, Minister Burke, step aside Leader of the House Albanese, who is now Prime

Minister. The member for Brighton was there in the trenches getting it done. He was there on behalf of Christopher Pyne –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I usually find the member for Mordialloc a little bit entertaining, but apart from being a bit disappointing, he has strayed a fair way from the motion, I would say. You need to bring it up a bit, Tim. Come on!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I encourage the member to come back to somewhere near the motion.

Tim RICHARDSON: I say it is 8:25, Leader of the Nationals. It is a hard slog, and my eye was caught by the next notice of motion that we have got on the notice paper. I am warming up for that one; that will be a good one. I do not know if you are aware of what it might be, but we will get to it very soon.

My contention is that we are on the side of the opposition here. This is a bipartisan – you would even describe it namely as a multipartisan – moment in time where we could agree that there could be a chance to get your notices of motion brought forward sooner. If you look at it, it is written – and if you say that we get some notes, we did get a few notes for this one. One of the dot points I have on here that I have read and I have shared with you in my notes was about making sure that any order could be taken and any order could be to bring on these notices of motion. There is a nice one here from the member for Bulleen. This is number 56 here – I know the member for Bulleen has had his eye on this one – about the Suburban Rail Loop and something about eggs in baskets and the member for Eltham. I mean, imagine if we could get back on that.

A member interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: We would love to do that, as a train enthusiast. We did see that wonderful video up in New South Wales that had about a billion views just talking about the rail tunnels up there. It did alright. But imagine if we could get back to that motion. This gives you hope. I look at number 60. Number 60 is from the member for Narracan. Here we go. There is another egg – eggs in baskets. We could get to this one from Pakenham. We could get onto this motion. I think this is misunderstood, and to the speaker that follows me, just have a bit of reflection on the fact that maybe not always there is some harm or some suggestion that we are not on your side. This is an opportunity to reorder them. It could be bills one day, it could be government notices, it could be notices of motion. We could get it done.

A member interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: It could be eggs. It could be excellent stuff. It could be anything that is on this, and I think that is really what this is about. It is about making sure that we have a more streamlined process. We hear time and time again from the member for Brighton on government business discussions around the efficient running of the house, discounting the fact that this person, the member for Brighton, is the biggest procedural motion interferer in the house's history – get around that sort of sneaky fact there. But this allows for us to grab a bit more time maybe for an extra bill contribution from those opposite. Maybe we could get a few in before question time before everyone puts a cue in the rack and then we do not see them for the rest of the day. Maybe it will give the Greens political party energy and purpose. The Greens have walked in; there may be a notice of motion for the Greens coming through. They knock off on a Wednesday afternoon, and we do not see them until the following Tuesday. Just have a bit of hope that this has actually got your interests at heart.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (20:27): I am very happy to rise after my opposite number over there, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier. He is a very, very entertaining fellow. He has brought up some very good points about this debate today, and I would love to debate some of these things that we have in here. The member for Bulleen said it earlier: there are so many important things and important motions we should be debating instead of motion 4. There is so much more than that; there is a lot on this paper. You know, the member for Greenvale got up earlier today and gave a

beautiful 10-minute stand-up comedy routine, and that is about all it was. He took his funny pills this morning and thought he would keep going with them. It was an amazing 10-minute stand-up comedy routine.

And then we just heard from the member for Mordialloc. The member for Mordialloc actually touched on some pretty good points, and if you indulge me I will go to those points. The member for Mordialloc said we should be debating the SEC. I agree. I would love to debate the SEC. Let us debate the SEC in these papers. Let us debate that and talk about all the employment opportunities that have happened in Morwell with the SEC. I would love to have a debate about that with the member for Mordialloc, and I think to date there is one job created in Morwell with the new SEC. I would be more than happy for the member for Mordialloc to get up and interject if he wishes, but we know there is only one job created in there. We also know I would love to debate the SEC because I get sick and tired in this chamber when I hear the Labor rhetoric about the SEC and who privatised the SEC and all that kind of stuff. They always forget that the person who actually did privatise the SEC was Joan Kirner back in 1992. We always forget that little chestnut in that debate. I would love to debate the SEC with the member for Mordialloc; it would be a very good debate. I know the member for Morwell would probably have a bit to contribute on that as well; he would have that.

But now we are here today and we are debating notice of motion 4, which the Leader of the House has put through. It was stated earlier that it is really no big deal when you read it. It is not a big deal at all. I think maybe this has been put forward because the government's approval ratings are going south – they are at 22 per cent – and maybe the government needs to do this to start sledge motions against us so they can put up their 30-second grab on social media to get that little quip of a funny line out. Maybe that is what it is all about. When the approval ratings start going south people do do weird things. The mind games start. I think that is what is happening with the government today.

We could be pessimistic on this side of the chamber and say, 'Well, maybe the ministers have run out of ideas and we need to fill space for the lack of quality bills that are coming through this chamber.' Maybe if I was being a pessimist I would say, 'Well, the ministers are all tired. They've been here for quite a while and they don't know what to do anymore.' They're putting through bills that are pretty inconsequential at times. We are debating a bill today that is actually very important – it is in the other place at the moment, so we cannot talk about that – but that is an exception to the rule. Maybe this is just an opportunity to go, 'The ministers are all a bit tired; they're all a bit puffed.' The Minister for Police cannot open his bottom drawer. Apparently it is locked and it has been jammed up for a few years. He does not know what is in there anymore. So maybe this notice of motion 4 is to just fill in space because the ministers are out of ideas.

But I do agree with the member for Mordialloc. I would love to also debate the Suburban Rail Loop. I think that is worth a debate. It really is worth a debate. I do not know how you are going to build a \$35 billion Suburban Rail Loop – that is stage 1 – when you have only got \$11 billion committed. You have only got \$2 billion from the federal government to date, and then you need \$11 billion from the feds and the rest is going to be created out of this thin air of value capture. Value capture – what a beautiful, beautiful statement that is. The value capture is from all reports generated from the income of windfall gains tax. They have to rezone the 60 precincts they are talking about, so there is the tax side of it – the windfall gains tax with stamp duty revenue and everything else. That is going to create this \$11 billion value capture. But the problem the government has with that is the development community has no taste for it. They have actually said it is not viable. I do not know how you are going to grab \$11 billion on something that is not viable. But I would be more than happy to debate the Suburban Rail Loop with the member for Mordialloc any day of the week.

He also mentioned earlier housing targets. Now, there is something worth debating – it is. We are here debating notice of motion 4, but housing targets are worth debating absolutely every day of the week. The member for Bulleen touched on it earlier. The government has not reached the housing targets. Eighty thousand a year was the initial announcement. Then it went to 800,000 over 10 years. We had to change the narrative on that because we knew the first year was not going to make it. We know the

second year is not going to make it. I would love to debate that. That would be an absolutely amazing thing, because I always love hearing the other side debate when they think they are right about something – when they are so passionate about it and they are so committed to it. But they are so totally wrong when it comes to housing targets, so totally wrong. I think in these first two years, when we get to September 2025, you are probably going to be 60,000 short of your initial targets. Then we are relying on the 60 precincts that they have put out there that the development community said has said are not viable. That is going to fail dismally, I am afraid. They will have to redo their aspirational targets. That is all they are; they are just figures. That is what this government does. They just throw out figures: ‘We’re going to build XYZ for this amount of money.’ But XYZ ends up costing double what it is meant to. So yes, I am happy to debate any of those things that the member for Mordialloc put forward.

The government is doing this to create sledge motions. They need to get some traction. They are going so far south in the polls that they think, ‘Well, let’s put this in. Let’s put item 4 in. Let’s get this over the line so we can try and pick on the opposition.’ But while they are focusing on the opposition, the problem is they are not focusing on Victorians and what they need. It is amazing how we live rent-free in their heads. It is fantastic. That is the cheapest rent in Victoria. The only cheap rent in Victoria is in the member for Mordialloc’s head. It is such a great place to live. There is a lot of space in there too, I will let you know that. I have been in there; there is a lot of space. But it is great to live rent-free, and it is the only cheap rent in this state.

That is my point: while they are focusing on the opposition, while they are trying to move this motion 4, they are forgetting about Victorians. They are forgetting about the cost-of-living crisis. They are forgetting about how expensive energy is today. They have actually stopped talking about energy. They do not want to talk about energy, because they know the ban on gas is hurting everyday Victorians. They know trying to electrify the state will not work, because the government is decades away from electrifying the state. We do not have the infrastructure to do it. They have banned gas too early. The ban on gas is decades too early. They need to do gas exploration. They need to look for the gas. There is only 1.6 trillion cubic feet in the Gippsland Basin – just a little bit of gas there – which is about 30 to 40 years supply. But we did not do any exploration for a decade, and now Victorians are suffering. Now the government is saying, ‘We want to electrify the state.’

This goes to the point of item number 4 on this paper. Let us say it gets through, which it probably will. In the spirit of bipartisanship and working together, why doesn’t the government get to pick some motions out of there and we get to pick some motions out of there and let us have the debate? I think there are some motions on here that the government really, really do not want to debate. The member for Mordialloc said he would be happy to debate anything he wanted to, but I doubt it. This has been put forward for one reason only: the government’s approval rating is going south. It is at 22 per cent, the lowest it has ever been, and they need this now to try and sledge us on this side of the chamber, just to make them look that little bit better on their social media grabs.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (20:37): I am very excited to rise – I thought I might be following another, but it is okay – to talk on the notice of motion 4 by the Leader of the House moving that a sessional order be adopted and come into effect from 1 April. I have got to say that the struggle is real on the other side of the house. The struggle is real because of the intellectual giants that they had to narrow down. They were the peak of the mountain, but it is not a peak of the mountain. There is such a wide base of intellectualism that the struggle was real to narrow it down to just a few, to really narrow it down to the best and brightest. I guess the government has taken blow after blow today and this evening.

I will move straight on then to the Manager of Opposition Business, who would never be accused of statements over substance – never. A real intellectual tour de force was in front of us tonight. I really did appreciate that she was able to point out that it is the people’s chamber, and I think the member for Greenvale dealt with that with his exploration of King Charles I appropriately. Members here will know all about the green carpet and the history of that and the sovereignty of this place over the Crown.

She also spoke about the lame legislation, then the lame legislative agenda that does not speak to the likes of ordinary Victorians. But we here are at 20 to 9 on a Thursday evening because of the agenda that we have been putting forward, that we do seek to pass in this place this week right now. I would have thought she could have done better than to call those important matters of community safety the ‘lame legislative agenda’. I thought she was better than that. I thought she could have done better than that. They are the likes and the needs of ordinary people in this state. I would disagree with her there.

I will also have to disagree with her on never changing sessional orders. Of course she would remember that at the start of this Parliament we did introduce sessional orders to change the standing orders as is appropriate, as is the practice, and that was on 7 February. Unfortunately for her they did actually change on 29 November. That was a year after they had been introduced and a mere year and a half ago. I do not want to quibble with her about misleading the house – she had that opportunity at the time. Leader of the Nationals, the sadly departed grandfather of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), we do actually genuinely miss your service there.

Danny O’Brien interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: You have departed from PAEC. No, you have not departed this mortal coil. You spoke to how the voice was very important – the voice of the communities, the voice of the opposition – and I want to assure you that it was not denied and has not been denied. You were not denied in the 10 minutes when you had the opportunity to speak to this motion – and to every motion and to every piece of agenda that comes to this place. But it is more about the voice versus the agenda. That is what we are talking about, and governments are given permission by the people to set the agenda. It is not to deny the voice of the opposition but to set the agenda of the government, because a rudderless government is far worse than a government that does set the agenda. The people expect us to have an agenda. They expect us to come to this place and set out an agenda that changes the face of Victoria for the better.

We know what a rudderless government looks like. It was 2010 to 2014. Nothing was achieved. That was a rudderless government. You did not need sessional orders then probably, because what was the point? Nothing was happening across the state, so I can understand why there are concerns about people getting on with the job. The Leader of the Nationals did expose, though, the differences between the Nationals and the Liberals. I agree with the Leader of the Nationals here: we do not have to be overextreme about these matters and go straight to dictatorship when there is a change in sessional orders, as the Manager of Opposition Business did. The Manager of Opposition Business diminishes dictatorships. She takes away the meaning of the word when she talks about dictatorships in a place like this, so I was very thankful to the Leader of the Nationals for bringing her back to task, for bringing it back to the place where we are, because there are people who are experiencing dictatorships today. The previous Leader of the Opposition came from a place that was exactly that. I hope that the Manager of Opposition Business can think about the language that she uses in this place and the importance of that language.

The Leader of the Nationals, however, did say that, whether he disagreed with the substance or not, he thought there was bad legislation coming to this place, and that was the gambling legislation this week and the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025 that came this week. I would have thought that his time on PAEC and hearing the gambling and tobacco licensing discussions would have led to him saying that actually these are really important pieces of legislation. Slowing down spin speeds for pokies venues I would have thought is something that is really important to the communities that he represents. It is important to the community that I represent. Every member opposite had the opportunity to have a say on those bills. Some chose to fill their time; some chose to take no time.

The member for Preston, I really appreciate, talked about some of the changes to the timings of this place to make them more family-friendly – that we are not here at these times and that the standing orders that require us to consider whether we adjourn for the day at 10 pm have not been used across

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1246

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

this term of Parliament. I do appreciate that we are changing these orders to fit in with the modern day. It is not all Charles I in this place. Sometimes we get into the 20th century and sometimes even the 21st. We have a real crack at that.

The member for Brighton had a litany of complaints, but that is not unusual. He presumes that a majority can form government, including an executive sometimes, but he also does not like that. He has never really liked that. It is really the majority of Brighton, the majority of one. But it is important, again, that we seek to have an agenda in this place.

James Newbury interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: Of course you heard; you are right here in front of me. The member for Eildon took particular offence, as she does as well, around access and availability of women's toilets, with a point of order. I guess we can probably move on from that, and I hope she will move on as well. The member for South-West Coast was completely invested and interested in gagging health services. She should speak to the member for Polwarth, who was also able to fill an emergency room on short notice, about how he can assist health services on any occasion that they would like.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great patients. They were very patient patients. That was a very good thing about them. He was concerned about the lack of time to debate during the 10 minutes of making a contribution, so congratulations. And then he filled out the talking time about –

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have not actually contributed to this motion yet, and I just wish to correct the record for the member, who has mistakenly identified my skill and prowess at the table and has misappropriated my many contributions.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is informative but not a point of order.

Mathew HILAKARI: I am embarrassed on this one. You have taken me appropriately to task. I am still thinking about the member for Polwarth and emergency departments and filling those spaces and I forgot about the member for South-West Coast. I did forget about the member for South-West Coast. She did fill out her time talking about road infrastructure and other concerns that she has raised before in this place. The fast-speaking member for Bulleen –

A member interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: It was his description, not my description. But he did slow down and speed up again. He did speak to some of the great Labor initiatives of the last 10 years – dental vans and other such matters – and I appreciate his support again. He is actually a fine contributor to this place. I do not think anyone would disagree that he is a real stand-out amongst those opposite, and I am sure he will get a third crack at it.

A member interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: Lazarus – three times. But he did say that they are not Luddites opposite and that the standing orders and the sessional orders in particular can actually be improved. They are not Luddites in the opposition, but that does contrast strongly with the view of the Manager of Opposition Business, who thinks that they can never be improved. Of course I would never describe her as a Luddite; that would be outrageous.

He was concerned, though, that they did not get to talk about some of the most important matters that they would like to raise. I am running out of time, but there were some important matters raised yesterday by those opposite, including the member for Croydon. Congratulations on his and his wife's happy anniversary of 20 years of marriage. The member for Gippsland East talked about the federal government recently announcing a roads package – probably not a contribution for this place – and

the member for Gippsland East talked about better emergency services, which I hope he supports.
(Time expired)

Tim READ (Brunswick) (20:47): We will have to hang around and ask the member for Point Cook to finish his speech later over at the bar. Before I begin I would just like to thank the members who have given the Greens a shout-out, particularly the members for Eildon and Bulleen, but there may have been others and my apologies for forgetting you. This particular motion we are debating appears to be an innocuous piece of housekeeping. That is certainly how it was presented to us, and indeed it might be. I will give you the heads-up that, while the Greens will be opposing it, it is quite possible that under different circumstances we could have supported it – more about that in a minute.

I note that it has not been to the Standing Orders Committee, which would probably be worthwhile and would have made it more supportable. I do also want to acknowledge that we appreciate the briefing that we have been given by the government on this. This is simply a motion that increases the government's flexibility to move in debate from bills to motions and back again on the notice paper. As I said earlier, it could well be an innocuous piece of housekeeping. However, I regard this with suspicion because of the countless changes that have occurred over the years removing the rights of non-government MPs. In fact, it would be hard to find a less democratic lower house in the Westminster system than this one. This is a house where non-government MPs do not have the ability to bring a substantive matter to a vote. When I started here in the previous term of Parliament I was surprised by the endless copycat speeches, particularly from government members but in fact from both sides, that were pretty much photocopies of one another, and they often just seemed to be filling time until the guillotine, as though it was important that there be no dead air between midday Tuesday and 5 pm on Thursday.

The content of these speeches and more especially the time-filling motions were either smearing the other side or preening and strutting and inflating the government or the opposition, depending on who is speaking. Very little of it, particularly after the first couple of speeches from any given party, contained actual substantive debate. I really wondered why this was until the member for Shepparton at the time, the former independent member for Shepparton Suzanna Sheed, sat down and explained to me that that was so that non-government MPs could not put up a private members bill or a motion and bring it to the vote, as they can in most other lower and upper houses in Westminster systems around the world, including in the other place here. Successive changes to sessional and standing orders have meant that non-government MPs do not have that basic ability. We would be more inclined to support this motion were it accompanied by the ability to do those things, were there some, for example, non-government business time on a Wednesday afternoon, as happens in the other place. If this was a more democratic chamber, a motion like this would be far more likely to get the support of all members. But trapped as we are in a system like this, it fills us all with suspicion.

Speaking of the guillotine, the guillotine is one of those things that we would regard as an outrageous infringement of our ability to represent our constituents if we had more meaningful debate in this chamber, but since we do not, it is barely noticeable – it is almost a relief. Instead of having non-government business time on a Wednesday afternoon, we essentially have a school debating club. Matters of public importance are largely a smear or an exercise in puffery. Instead of fixing that we have got this motion, small though it is.

Another thing that would persuade me to the support this motion would be if we had consideration in detail. In fact to find out what consideration in detail involves I wander over to the Legislative Council periodically to see what real MPs do, because here –

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is a bit rich for the Greens, who are never in the chamber, to be talking about what real MPs do.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

MOTIONS

1248

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

Tim READ: I appreciate that I possibly have struck a nerve. I cannot imagine how. If consideration in detail was something that was practised more often in this chamber, that would be the sort of thing that would allow a motion like this to pass without comment. It is also important to note that third parties – that is, not the big two – and independents are simply unable to speak on procedural motions. So in the debate on the government business program you do not normally hear an independent or a Green speaking, and therefore we cannot explain to anyone why we are voting the way we vote, so we often do not. The lack of non-government business time –

A member interjected.

Tim READ: I am persuaded by an interjection, Deputy Speaker, if you do not mind, to explain that point a little further. On non-government business motions we often abstain simply because we do not have the opportunity to explain which way we are voting. It would seem to me a basic and fundamental right of any MP in any kind of Parliament or representative chamber to be allowed 60 seconds to get up and say why they are voting yes or no, and we do not have that right in procedural motions. There are three speakers for the affirmative and three speakers for the negative; you will get three from the coalition and three from the government, and you will not hear a Green or an independent. We do not have to get up and speak in every one of them, but it would be nice to have the ability to have 60 seconds to get up and explain why we are or are not supporting, for example, the government business program. I am sure this is something that could easily be fixed. Instead we get this motion. Essentially we will not be supporting this change to sessional orders, because we are tired of the thousands of incremental changes that increase the power of the executive to control Parliament and take it away from its original purpose, which is to be a representative chamber.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (49): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (28): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Education policy

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (21:01): I move:

That this house recognises the Allan Labor government's commitment to working families by expanding free breakfast clubs, saving parents \$400 through the school saving bonus and extending the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, ensuring every student has access to essential programs, no matter their circumstances.

I would not mind continuing my contribution on those matters for maybe the next half an hour. I have got plenty to say. I might just start –

MOTIONS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1249

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Polwarth can leave the chamber for an hour. The member for Mornington can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Members for Polwarth and Mornington withdrew from chamber.

Anthony CARBINES: I will talk about a school breakfast program in West Heidelberg in my electorate, where 50 per cent of the community live in public housing, at the Olympic Village Primary School rebuilt by Labor – a \$6 million new school in my electorate funded by the Labor government. I was very pleased to head out there in November last year with the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Education, and the Premier of Victoria to kick off the fantastic contribution of our school breakfast program. We have seen a fantastic effort, with some thousand schools already participating in the school breakfast program. We saw \$21 million in the budget just last year and, since 2016, \$162 million contributed to that program.

To have the school breakfast program at a brand new school in West Heidelberg of \$6 million built by the Andrews and Allan Labor governments in my electorate is a demonstration of the contribution that we are prepared to make to hardworking families in my electorate. Can I say also that not only have we delivered that program, but we did not cut the education maintenance allowance, like those opposite did when they were last in government. Free Fruit Friday was also cut by those opposite when they were in government. That was the mean and nasty streak of the Baillieu and Napthine governments. We will never forget it. We remember the school closures under that dreadful Jeffrey Kennett. We will never forget it. And they tried to privatise the Austin Hospital in my electorate too. How did that go? You should ask Mr Vin Heffernan. They have never voted Liberal again in the Ivanhoe electorate, and they have never had a look in in Ivanhoe ever since that time.

I do not mind also pointing out that when we were at the Olympic Village Primary School we saw something like \$287 million in the 2024–25 budget to ease the cost-of-living pressures, ease the squeeze on families, through the school saving bonus. I have also seen the benefit of the school saving bonus in my community and further cost-saving measures – cost-of-living benefits for the community in my electorate and for so many other electorates right across the state. Can I also say that we actually talked about in November last year in my electorate the 50-millionth meal in the school breakfast program provided to students in the West Heidelberg community. And I tell you what, they know great support when it is coming their way.

Olympic Village Primary School was built in the 1950s for the Olympic Games, a new school that was rebuilt there in West Heidelberg – a \$6 million new school. We also have a new State Emergency Service built on the site of the old Heidelberg West police station, in fact just around the corner. We have also seen the Tarakan housing estate rebuilt. We have also seen an announcement just this week in terms of the Bell-Bardia housing estate, costing some \$27.5 million, on the Bell-Bardia site – \$27 million from our government and also the federal government. It is about cost-of-living changes and about supporting communities. If the Olympic Village Primary School is going to be rebuilt for \$6 million under our government, what we also need to make sure happens is that we have got places for people in my community to live, a community that is represented by some 50 per cent by public housing tenants in West Heidelberg.

We see that support for those communities in West Heidelberg at election time with the work that they do backing in Labor governments time and time again, who back them locally. There is nothing quite like the tsunami of support that comes through West Heidelberg on election night, and we get that support because we backed them with a brand new school in West Heidelberg with Olympic Village Primary School. We backed them with the new Tarakan housing estate, the Bell-Bardia housing estate, the housing estate there in Bellfield by Launch Housing and the Ford Park redevelopment of two new ovals on one site. We see it through North Heidelberg at Olympic Park there, the great work that they do – \$8 million from our government there in West Heidelberg. As a former Banyule city councillor

MOTIONS

1250

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

in West Heidelberg, I do not mind saying it has been a great privilege to represent that community now for 20 years, both as a local councillor and a member of this place. When the chips are down, it is the people of West Heidelberg that you can always count on. They know the value of a government that represents them, supports the education maintenance allowance, supports the school saving bonus, supports the Austin Hospital and provides 50 million education school breakfast program benefits for our local community.

I also want to add, if I can, that in my electorate of Ivanhoe, with the work that we do with the school breakfast program, mum taught at local schools in my electorate – yes, she did – at Ivanhoe Primary School in my electorate. That is another school that has benefited from significant capital investments, both the Beehive, which has been built by our government, and the treehouse classrooms built by our government at Ivanhoe Primary School. These are further investments in the local electorate of Ivanhoe, who were beneficiaries of the school breakfast program, the Ivanhoe Primary School where mum taught for many years.

It is a polling booth there at Ivanhoe Primary School. I must say I did get a bit worried at the last election when the Liberal Party volunteers left the booth early at Ivanhoe Primary School. I got a bit worried that they had just folded the tent, decided it was all over and that they had nailed it, and I was in a lot of trouble. The Labor Party was in trouble in Ivanhoe. Then I realised that the Greens had almost come second at the Ivanhoe polling booth at the primary school. The Greens were still there counting. The Liberal Party had gone home early. I am tipping that at the next election at the Ivanhoe Primary School it will be the Greens that will be coming a very close second out there in the southern end of the Ivanhoe electorate.

What it comes back to is that Ivanhoe Primary School is a beneficiary of the school breakfast program. It is a school that has also benefited from my mother teaching there for over a decade. It was very handy at the polling booth on election day to have your mum there. She does a great job. Not only Ivanhoe Primary School, but I am a product of the Viewbank College, the old Rosanna East High School – in my own electorate. There are many, I am sure, in this place who not only grew up in their electorates but went to school in their electorates and had parents teach at schools in their electorate. This is the benefit of being a local product of your electorate: to be able to go to those schools and then return and deliver a \$11.5 million performing arts centre at a school that you went to. When you think it looks exactly the same as it did when you left, when you then had the opportunity to represent them some 20 years later in this place, when the school programs like the breakfast program come to pass in this electorate and when you are first elected to this place, it had been some 20 years since I had been to the school – to be able to deliver a performing arts centre for \$11.5 million at Viewbank College, as it is known today. It is about giving back to the places that gave us opportunities to make a contribution in our community.

As we work our way around the Ivanhoe electorate, I was recently at the Heidelberg Primary School. You would all have to work very hard to get a \$16 million commitment to a local primary school in your electorate, and I am very pleased to say that the shovels are being turned and the work is happening at Heidelberg Primary School – a \$16 million redevelopment at Heidelberg Primary School – a beneficiary not only of the breakfast program but also the Smile Squad program and other cost-of-living initiatives to support communities like mine in the Ivanhoe electorate.

Heidelberg of course is the beating heart of the Ivanhoe electorate. My electorate office is there, as are two hospitals on one site: the new Austin and Mercy hospitals built by the Bracks Labor government. I remember heading out there with my former employer, the member for Melbourne at the time and Minister for Health the Honourable Bronwyn Pike, and we were out there with the community. There was a sausage sizzle welcoming the community to the new Austin Hospital and the Mercy Hospital – two hospitals on one site. And there was a member in the other place at the time – I think it might have been East Yarra Province – Mr Davis at the sausage sizzle. He was the Shadow Minister for Health – a very hardworking Shadow Minister for Health, I would have to say. He was there to celebrate the opening of the Austin and Mercy hospitals, two new hospitals on one site. I make mention of that

MOTIONS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1251

because of course this is the location where we are spending \$16 million at Heidelberg Primary School, a very significant redevelopment where the school breakfast program operates for some 600-plus students in my electorate, a critical program. I am really pleased that they are the beneficiaries of the Smile Squad, of the education school breakfast program and of education in terms of the school saving bonus. There are many beneficiaries at Heidelberg Primary, and they are going to benefit from a \$16 million redevelopment thanks to the Allan Labor government.

Of course then you move across to Viewbank Primary School, and I was there just recently for new school captains. My brother went to school at Viewbank Primary School a long time ago, another school that benefits from the breakfast program under our government and a school that has some 650 students and does an amazing job. We have also spent a significant amount of money there – \$8 million on a modform redevelopment at Viewbank Primary School. We have seen the classroom redevelopment. I had the Deputy Premier out to open that just recently, and we also did some further work through COVID when we craned in the prefabricated modform classroom buildings; it was a fantastic effort. We have seen something like, I would say, about \$12 million of redevelopment at Viewbank Primary School, and that has been a very significant redevelopment. It is a school that of course continues to benefit from the school breakfast program in my electorate and a school that also provides an opportunity for education through the Watsonia army barracks in my electorate to many defence force personnel who send their kids to Viewbank Primary School.

Not far from there of course is Banyule Primary School. Banyule Primary School is another polling booth in my electorate that has had very significant support for not only our government but for other parties in this place. We have seen at the moment a \$5 million new school hall redevelopment there; that has concluded. We are actually going out there very soon to open a \$12 million redevelopment at Banyule Primary School.

I know my colleagues are probably a little bit envious of the work that we have been able to conclude in the Ivanhoe electorate. There is not a school that you can go to that has not had significant investment from our government – primary schools that are also significantly supported by the cost-of-living benefits of the Smile Squad, of the school breakfast program and of the school saving bonus in the electorate of Ivanhoe. That is why I am keen to get the Premier out there or perhaps the education minister to open what is a \$12 million redevelopment of the administration and classroom wings at Banyule Primary School. It is a very significant school in my electorate – again, over 600 students. There are not many schools that have less than 600 students in relation to primary schools in my electorate. We bounce across –

Sam Groth: Acting Speaker, I am enjoying the contribution from the member for Ivanhoe, and I think there would be more people who would also enjoy this contribution, so I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Anthony CARBINES: Of course it would be remiss of me not to mention Rosanna Golf Links Primary School. Our daughter Ava, who was not born when I first entered this place some years ago, has now moved on to high school, but she concluded her schooling at Rosanna Golf Links Primary School, where the school breakfast program plays a key role. The Rosanna Golf Links Primary School is also the regional deaf facility in my electorate, and so students there also learn sign language, learn Auslan, and do a fantastic job. In fact we were at an Anzac service the other year with Ava, my daughter, and the anthem was happening – we were at the West Heidelberg RSL – and she was signing and she said, ‘Well, why doesn’t everyone sign the anthem?’, because she assumed that this is what everybody does. It just says a lot, I think, about what happens at Rosanna Golf Links Primary School, who are beneficiaries of that school breakfast program, beneficiaries of the school saving bonus, beneficiaries of the Smile Squad work – cost-of-living benefits that our government is providing to communities right across the state – and beneficiaries of a significant redevelopment that was opened by the former Deputy Premier of Victoria, the former honourable member for Monbulk James

MOTIONS

1252

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

Merlino. But also you would remember of course the professor who was the designer of the cochlear implant. He also played a role in opening the Rosanna Golf Links Primary School. That was also a key milestone at Rosanna Golf Links Primary School, and it goes again not only to the investments in the bricks and mortar at our schools in the Ivanhoe electorate but to the cost-of-living pressures around Smile Squad, school saving bonus and school breakfast program that make a big difference to families across my electorate.

Just a drop punt from there is the St Martin of Tours Primary School, which comes under the program provided by our government for Catholic schools around capital works. Again, I had the honourable member for Monbulk prior to the current amazing member for Monbulk come out to open a very significant redevelopment there at St Martin of Tours. The work that they do and the work that we do together is not only on capital works but to make sure that we provide savings for those families who work so hard to send their kids to get a great education.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Ivanhoe East Primary School and the work that we have done there collaborating not only on providing the school breakfast program but to ensure that when the Mother of God Primary School closed we were able to secure the facility just next door for the state education department so that we could expand the offering from Ivanhoe East Primary School, a state school that was growing. We needed additional land and additional buildings, and we were able to reach an agreement for a long-term lease from Catholic education in Melbourne so that they could expand Ivanhoe East Primary School into what was the old Mother of God, or MOG, site there in East Ivanhoe. This is about making sensible decisions that support local communities – that support them around the school saving bonus, support them around the Smile Squad services and support them around the work that we are able to do with the school breakfast program.

I did note that also, since the member for Kew is here in the chamber, it would be remiss of me not to mention the work that we have done together – and her predecessor in fact; it would be remiss of me to give too much credit and to ignore the former member for Kew – to provide a multimillion-dollar redevelopment at Kew High School. Kew High School is not a beneficiary of the school breakfast program, which is particularly focused at our primary schools. But so many of the parents of children in Ivanhoe and Ivanhoe East primary schools, who are beneficiaries of the school breakfast program, send their children to Kew High School across the river. When I went there to do the opening, a multimillion-dollar opening, people thought it was brave to advocate to secure multimillion dollars of funding for a high school that is not in your electorate. But we understand the key relationships between the people in Kew and the people in East Ivanhoe and that our families seek to get a good education and attend Kew High. I met the school captains at the time, who are previous students at Ivanhoe East and Ivanhoe primary schools, because a very significant number of students from my electorate attended that school. It was great to be able to work in a collaborative fashion with the previous and the current members for Kew on the redevelopment of Kew High, with the benefits that that has provided to students, who are also able to be great learners at school. At Ivanhoe East and Ivanhoe primary schools they did have access to the school breakfast program and they were able to focus on their education. An army marches on its stomach, and if you cannot concentrate and if you are thinking about what you are going to get to eat and where your next meal is coming from and not on what your teacher is teaching you and the work that is being committed for you to focus on, well, you cannot succeed, and our government understands that.

I want to just cut back across the border, back into the safe havens of the Ivanhoe electorate, to Macleod. Macleod College of course saw another \$5 million investment in the science rooms that were opened. He was pretty busy, that former member for Monbulk the Honourable James Merlino, at the time. That is actually a P-12 school and has a Macleod primary school attached to it, right next door to the new \$5 million science wing, which we were able to open under our government. Again, that is just about providing opportunities in the Macleod community, to expand their offerings around access to the school breakfast program and then to be able to kick on to the secondary school in brand new science facilities.

MOTIONS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1253

I feel that I have taken us on a bit of a journey across the Ivanhoe electorate, and it really has been a demonstration of what we have been able to achieve over the past decade after the four very mean and nasty lean years as the member for Ivanhoe in opposition, and it did take some time to work towards the commitments that we needed to make to turn things around. I do not mind saying as well that perhaps we could have done more when we had our opportunities in government previously to provide investments, support and services to schools in my electorate. But we did not waste any time, and we got that opportunity again when we were the first government to be elected after only four years in opposition in over half a century. That does not just happen. To make history, you have to work hard. To make history, you have to make commitments that the community want to back and want to support. We were very fortunate to have the leadership from our party of someone who understood communities and understood what it was to make commitments that people understood and wanted to see delivered.

More recently I was at Olympic Village Primary School, a brand new school in my electorate that had not had any work done on it really since it was built for the 1956 Olympic Games, where the Olympic Village was built for our community. To come back to that location, knock it over, build a new school for that community just opposite the brand new Banyule Community Health service, which was opened by former Premier Steve Bracks, it was a further indication of the work and commitment that our government has delivered to the 3081 postcode, an area that I lived in for seven years – in West Heidelberg, in Olympic Village, in Goodenough Court just off Liberty Parade – a community that I was able to represent on Banyule City Council and then in this place. They hold you accountable. We will be there at the iftar dinner in the mall in West Heidelberg on Friday night. I will be joined there by Kate Thwaites, our federal member of Parliament. We will be tucking into a meal there at some point at the iftar dinner. What I am also reminded of is the meals that we are able to provide to students in the school breakfast program, and I think it is important. What happens with a bite to eat is it is about people coming together. As the member for Hastings well knows – and I await with anticipation the menu and the recipe book that he has been working on – food in the school breakfast program is about the preparation and it is about bringing people together.

The saying ‘breaking bread’ is really one about breaking down barriers and bringing people together, as tough as things might be. And iftar dinners I think are another opportunity that we will see in West Heidelberg on Friday night in the mall that is about bringing people together and understanding that the preparation of the meal, the respect for that, opening their doors and bringing people together is a great equaliser. Sharing, as the member for Hastings knows, is what is all about. I think that is what we are trying to do here with the school breakfast program: provide opportunities for people to come together, take some time out and do something that they are all doing together. It is not something that you are excluded from. It is not something that someone else does and you miss out on; it is about sharing those opportunities together. We will do that on Friday night, and we will give some contemplation and some thought to those in many parts of the world who are missing out on this opportunity, reflect on what it is to spend time together and to break bread together and also I think reflect on the opportunities that our government gave with our 50 millionth meal last year in the same postcode. Fifty million times we have provided opportunities for people to line their stomachs, to sit down and take some time out from what is difficult when they are missing out and to understand what it is like to be included and understand what is like to be part of something and not feel shame about that but feel good about it. I think that these are the things that we understand. I do not think it is just this side. I think the Parliament understands the value of providing these opportunities.

As we come to concluding on these matters and allowing an opportunity for others to speak to them –

Sam Groth: I draw your attention to the state of the house, Acting Speaker.

Quorum formed.

Anthony CARBINES: Waratah Special Development School, I do not think I have had the chance to tell you about. I want to thank the member for Mordialloc, who has done a lot of work around

MOTIONS

1254

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

special development schools and securing funding across the state for special development schools. The northern suburbs actually benefit from the Waratah Special Development School with regard to breakfast programs and the work that is provided there. We have actually got a very significant multimillion-dollar redevelopment to open at Waratah. Maybe the member for Mordi might be interested in coming and giving me a hand with that. Stay away from the trampoline. We did attend and I gave that a bit of a tryout a couple of years ago, and my trampoline skills were put to the test. Fortunately, other than the member for Mordialloc and me, nobody else saw the not quite triple pike somersault that did not quite come off. But the Waratah Special Development School provides great services for the people of the northern suburbs.

Sometimes we get parochial about our electorates, and I know it is not necessarily somewhere that is attended by local people in my community, but it says a lot for the Ivanhoe community that they extend the hand of friendship to others and provide these services in the community down there in Bellfield and West Heidelberg. At the Waratah Special Development School they have got an expansion. We will open that. It is ready to go. It is a fantastic service, and it provides opportunities to people from the great, mighty northern suburbs to have the education experience that they need but also in a way that provides this broader range of services that we have seen and that I have touched on right across the electorate.

I have gone to St John's in Heidelberg, to St Pius there in West Heidelberg, to Mary Immaculate in Ivanhoe and many of the other great schools in the Ivanhoe electorate that do significant work. I was even just across the border there at La Trobe University with the fantastic chancellor there, the Honourable John Brumby, just last week with many of my colleagues. From start to finish, education in the Ivanhoe electorate and just beyond the borders has been very significant. We rebuilt Fairy Hills preschool just on King Street off Lower Heidelberg Road. It is ready to open, providing some hundred-plus placements for people in my electorate so that when they head off to Ivanhoe Primary School or Ivanhoe East Primary School or other schools in my electorate they too have access to the school breakfast program, because our government is going to continue to fund the school breakfast program.

I was very fortunate to have the Deputy Premier and the Premier at the 50 millionth meal serving at Olympic Village Primary School, a \$6 million rebuilt, brand new school in the Ivanhoe electorate. It just goes to show that it might be a community that has been around for centuries, but you can still build brand new schools in electorates that are not out in the virgin fields of the outer burbs. Sometimes these renewal projects need to happen much closer to home.

It is not just about bricks and mortar about the services that are provided by our teachers and support staff. It is about making sure that they are supported in the classroom by being able to give their attention to the next generation of people who are going to represent us in this place, because they get to start their day with a meal that is provided by amazing parents who volunteer in our schools to prepare those meals. The thing that you cannot put past it is not just the cost and the budget expense of taxpayer funds that we commit but the love with which it is created and the outcomes that are delivered. And I commend – *(Time expired)*

Jess WILSON (Kew) (21:31): That was a tour of Ivanhoe. Thank you to the Minister for Police. I will give you a tour of Kew. We started with Kew High School, so we have a good start there. I have to say my mum just texted me in fact, and for some bizarre reason she tuned in to the house and she did say, 'This man just keeps repeating himself.' You had one spectator, but congratulations on making it for 30 minutes. But really I think the question is: where is Ben? Where is the Minister for Education, the member for Niddrie, tonight talking about the Education State? He has thrown his colleague, his friend, in here to speak for 30 minutes on this motion, and where is he? I am sure he is here like all of us, so we are looking forward to him coming in and speaking to the Education State.

If we look at the data when it comes to Victoria, only a few weeks ago there was data that demonstrated that Victoria has the least government funding when it comes to government schools than any other state and territory in Australia – \$16,000 per student compared to \$18,000 for the national average. It

is all very well and good to speak about access to certain programs that some students in the state have, but if you do not fully fund our government schools here in Victoria, then students do not have access to the best educational opportunities. How do we know that? Because our educational outcomes are in decline. Year after year our NAPLAN results and our international results in this state demonstrate that our students are not getting the education they deserve. If you look at our NAPLAN results from last year, 30 per cent, one in three Victorian students, are not meeting numeracy or literacy standards in this state. One in three in the state of Victoria are not meeting proficiency standards when it comes to maths or English. That is an absolute blight on this government. The fact that this government cannot fully fund our schools means that our students cannot access the education that they deserve.

While our schools here in Victoria have the lowest government funding of any state or territory in this country, we also see that our parents, our families, are forced in this state to pay the second highest fees and charges when it comes to sending their children to government schools – the second highest – and it is the highest when it comes to primary schools. The highest voluntary contributions, fees and charges for families to send their children to schools are in Victoria. That is because this government are not fully funding schools in this state. They are in fact the least funded when it comes to any state or territory in this country. This government and this minister had to go cap in hand to the federal government to help them out – cap in hand to the federal Labor government to say, ‘We can’t afford to fully fund our schools in this state. We have managed the books so poorly in this state that we cannot fully fund our schools.’ That is why. The data does not lie. On average a student in Victoria receives \$16,900 compared to the national average of \$18,500. That is the difference between the national average and what a student here in Victoria receives – the lowest of any state or territory. So the minister went to Canberra and said, ‘Can you help me? Can you help me out? We cannot afford it here in Victoria.’ We cannot afford it because we have had \$50 billion worth of cost blowouts on major projects – \$50 billion as a result of corruption on major projects when it comes to funnelling money to the CFMEU, to bikies and to organised crime. That is the result of making decisions in this state that help out your mates in the union movement instead of putting money into essential services.

Members interjecting.

Jess WILSON: ‘Teachers,’ say those opposite. Our teachers in this state are the lowest paid in Australia. So when we have a situation where our government schools have the lowest funding of any state or territory, according to the Productivity Commission – not according to me and not according to us, but according to the Productivity Commission – and you have the lowest paid teachers in this state, is it any wonder that we have a teacher exodus and that we have teachers leaving the profession in droves? How many vacancies are there in Victoria today when it comes to teachers? One thousand teacher vacancies across the state. If you are not able to get teachers into classrooms, what does that mean? Consequences for students. It means that they are not getting the best education. And where is that borne out? In our results, with one in three Victorian students not being proficient when it comes to numeracy and literacy in this state.

We have heard time and time again this government talk about the Education State, but on every metric we are in reverse, whether it is the teacher shortage crisis or whether it is the fact we have the least funding when it comes to government schools or when it comes to what this government has done in terms of creating division in this state – school choice. We have seen this government put a tax on independent and Catholic schools. I note the member for Ivanhoe, as he gave us a tour of his electorate and went school by school, did not mention a number of schools in his electorate that really are feeling the pinch. We did not hear about Ivanhoe Girls’ Grammar, which I visited very recently, and we did not hear about Ivanhoe Grammar, which are subject to this government’s tax on schools – their schools tax. There is a cost-of-living crisis, and this government is adding thousands of dollars to school fees in this state. School fees in this state are being put up as a direct result of this government’s mismanagement. They have decided to tax education. So they come in here and they talk about the programs that they have had to put in place because they have had to make cuts in every other aspect of government services.

MOTIONS

1256

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

In a horror budget last year they had to come to the table at the eleventh hour and say, ‘What’s something to distract from everything else that we’re cutting from? What’s something to distract from the fact that we don’t fully fund our schools and that we have the lowest paid teachers in this state? Let’s talk about a school saving bonus’ – a school saving bonus that this government is not even paying its bills for. It is a school saving bonus where small businesses are meeting their obligations, providing uniforms, providing whatever it may be, and this government is failing to pay those invoices. It is tens of thousands of dollars the Department of Education is not paying, because this government cannot afford to pay its bills. In fact it took the Premier to step in and say ‘That’s unacceptable’ and to tell the Minister for Education, her Deputy Premier, to make sure he is actually paying his bills on time. Because when small businesses in this state are doing it incredibly tough, in the worst place in Australia to do business, this government cannot even pay its bills on time.

We heard from the member for Ivanhoe about the incredible capital investment he has seen in various schools in his electorate. Well, it is lucky that the member for Ivanhoe has seen some funds flow into his electorate because for many of us we have not seen that. I visited with the member for Nepean Red Hill Primary and Dromana Secondary College. These are schools that are in desperate need of upgrades.

Tim Richardson interjected.

Jess WILSON: Eastbourne Primary – in fact we were speaking about it today – is a school that has been waiting for desperately needed upgrades and is still waiting. Kew High has asbestos in its roof that this government is refusing to remove despite relentless requests by the school, by me to the minister and by the member for Ivanhoe to say this school has raised \$1.2 million through its own fundraising to upgrade its classrooms, and this government is not coming to the table with the \$60,000 it will take to remove the asbestos that is in those classrooms, preventing the school with its own fundraising to do what it needs to upgrades those facilities – a school that has its roof collapsing.

We want to do a tour. Canterbury Girls Secondary College had a wall fall down while students were at school – bricks crumbling, thousands of students onsite – and nothing has been invested in that school. Kew East Primary for decades has seen no capital funding into that school – again, classrooms full of asbestos. Balwyn Primary School has doubled in size since 2011 and does not have enough toilet facilities, yet this government refuses time and time again to actually invest in upgrades.

They talk about governing for everyone and they talk about governing for the whole state, but it is governing for their own electorates, and that is it. That is why in last year’s budget we saw 29 school upgrades unfunded. On the eve of the last election this government made commitments to upgrade 89 schools and to deliver those upgrades by the next election. Well, with 18 months to go and 29 still unfunded and another 25 not even at the tender stage, I think there is not much hope that they will be delivered before the next election.

This government talks a big game when it comes to cost of living, but if you look on any metric this state is in decline and Victorians are feeling the pinch. It is a cost-of-living crisis. In 1999 in terms of our real gross state product per capita we were 1.7 per cent above the national average. We have now fallen 11.5 per cent below the national average. Victorian household income has fallen below the national average and every state and territory except South Australia. So to come in here and claim that they are delivering for Victorians in terms of cost of living is an insult to every single Victorian. Why? Because of the inflationary impact of this government – the cost blowouts on the Big Build projects, \$50 billion in cost blowouts, that make it basically unaffordable to buy a home in this state or to find a tradie in this state. They are pushing up the prices at every opportunity. Why? Because they are funnelling it to the CFMEU, their union mates and to organised crime. That is what those opposite are complicit in every single day – funnelling it to organised crime on the taxpayer dime.

To come in here and to claim that cost-of-living relief is what they are delivering for Victorians is a complete and utter insult. We see it every single day, whether it is the cost of energy in this state – small businesses and businesses that cannot continue to operate – or whether it is the taxes. Today

another tax has hit Victorians, which is going to make it harder for Victorians to make ends meet. Just think about the taxes that are hitting our businesses: the increase in payroll tax and the increase in WorkCover premiums under this government. I do not know what the member for Nepean hears, but I am yet to hear a business that has only suffered a 43 per cent increase when it comes to WorkCover premiums. The cost of living is real, and it is because the Allan Labor government cannot manage money that every Victorian is feeling the pinch. Every single Victorian is feeling the pinch because this government has no respect for taxpayers money. They think it is a magic money tree – magic pudding economics, according to this government. It cannot continue, because Victorians cannot continue to be hit with these taxes. They cannot continue to pick up the bill because of this government.

Housing in this state is unaffordable. We come in here nearly every week and there is another piece of legislation when it comes to housing, yet we have not seen any impact when it comes to increasing the supply of housing in this state. We have not seen housing affordability become something that Victorians can dream of again; in fact it is going in the opposite direction. On the day that the government announced their housing statement they also announced a raft of new property taxes. How can you put it out there that you are going to build 80,000 new homes a year but at the same time say you are going to introduce new taxes on the property sector? How on earth are those houses going to be delivered? We know the answer: they are not going to be delivered, because this government has walked away from that target every day since.

We hear time and time again from this government that the cost of living and the Education State are absolutely their focus. If you are a Victorian family sending your child to school you would be thinking anything but. We see crumbling facilities every single day. We see toxic mould in classrooms. We see walls falling down. We hear regularly – I am sure the member for Nepean hears regularly – that classrooms are not air-conditioned. In fact when we went to Red Hill primary they were not heated. This government only looks after its pet projects and funnels money into political projects in its electorates. It is not governing for all Victorians, and Victorians continue to pay the price.

If we want to talk about incredible waste under this government when it comes to the Education State, we saw this government introduce the tutor learning initiative, a \$1.2 billion program. Why? Because they had to try and reverse the incredible impacts of the COVID school lockdowns, something that we are going to continue to see the tail of for many, many years to come. The Auditor-General looked into the tutor learning initiative, the \$1.2 billion program of taxpayers money, and what did they find? They found the initiative did not significantly improve students' learning compared to similar non-tutored students. In fact the Auditor-General found:

... that students who received tutoring learnt less than those who did not receive tutoring.

So the \$1.2 billion program that this government put in place saw students who actually used the program and used the tutoring learn less than those students who did not access the program. You cannot make this up. Whether it comes to upgrading facilities, leaving these projects unfunded and not delivering a fair share right across the state of Victoria; whether it is our teacher shortage crisis because they are the lowest paid teachers in the country; or whether it is the fact that this government underfunds our schools so that we see that Victorian government schools have the least funding of any state or territory, this government is not delivering for students.

Let me just finish on another big claim from this government. This government talks a big game when it comes to early childhood and education and their free kinder program. This program is supposedly going to see 50 early childhood centres open across Victoria. They were going to be delivered by 2026, by 2027, by 2028. What happened in the last budget? They were kicked out to the 2030s because this government cannot afford them. These childcare centres are desperately needed in childcare deserts in regional Victoria in particular and in Victoria's growth suburbs, yet this government has kicked the can down the road once again.

It is okay to focus on making sure we give another billion here or there on a blowout on a major project, but when it comes to delivering what Victorians actually need, when it comes to making sure that

MOTIONS

1258

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

Victorians have access to child care and when it comes to making sure that we see more women getting back into the workforce, this government decides, 'No, let's prioritise giving another billion dollars to the West Gate Tunnel.' That is the reality of this government.

When it comes to the free kinder program, it is another program that sounds terrific on TV and sounds terrific in an ad. But when it comes to actually putting it in place and delivering it for Victorians, what do we find? They have not put any resources behind it. There is no funding to follow. What does that mean? Many, many, many kindergartens, particularly sessional kindergartens run by local councils, cannot afford to deliver the program. I hear from local councils every single day – indeed from the member for Nepean's electorate – that cannot afford to be in the kinder space anymore, and they are thinking about exiting. What does that mean? What does it mean for those families that then cannot access places because this government is more focused on a political slogan on the eve of an election than actually delivering real policy that is going to deliver for Victorians.

Whatever measure you look at, this government is failing Victorians when it comes to delivering what they need in terms of cost-of-living relief. To come in here tonight and say that Victorians are doing so well under this government and so well under the Minister for Education's watch, who is clearly more distracted by making phone calls to his colleagues about whether or not he has got their support to take over from the Premier – whether he is more focused on that than actually delivering in his portfolio –

Members interjecting.

Jess WILSON: Whether he is more focused on speaking to his colleagues than actually delivering for Victorians, the Minister for Education needs –

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I have a lot of time for the member for Kew, but she is impugning a member, and that is the Deputy Premier. He is absolutely committed to his job as the Minister for Education. Frankly, I would not be throwing stones from a glass house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): There is no point of order.

Jess WILSON: I am pleased to see that the Minister for Environment has put his support behind the Deputy Premier. Good to see. The Minister for Education needs to focus on doing his job. Let us just remember one recent example of where the Minister for Education had taken his eye off the prize. He claims that he learned about the fact that this government is going to put high-risk youth offenders in mainstream classrooms from the *Herald Sun*. That is how across the brief the Minister for Education is. His department is briefing principals and teachers about the fact that this program is going to roll out in a matter of weeks, yet how does the Minister for Education find out about it? In the *Herald Sun* on Saturday morning. That is how across his brief he is. So when it comes to delivering the Education State, when it comes to making sure that students have access to the best possible schooling that they deserve, this government is letting them down – the lowest funded schools in the country, the lowest paid teachers in the country, one in three Victorian students that are not meeting the proficiency standards when it comes to literacy and numeracy. We are seeing parents being forced to pay more to send their students to school. We know from recent data that Victorian families pay the second highest in the nation when it comes to sending their children to a government school, the highest when it comes to primary schools.

We on this side of the house are focused on how to deliver real cost-of-living relief and how to make sure that we deliver essential services that actually deliver for Victorians. This government cannot manage money, and Victorian students are paying the price.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (21:57): It gives me great pleasure this evening to stand up and contribute on this motion because it gives me the opportunity to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting working families in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing, whether that be through the \$400 school saving bonus, whether that be through our breakfast clubs, which every single school

MOTIONS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1259

in my electorate takes the opportunity to use, or whether that indeed be through the capital works upgrades or the new schools that we have built in my electorate. We know that world-class infrastructure makes a difference in the educational lives of Victorians.

It is also fantastic for me to follow the contribution of the member for Kew, the shadow minister for private schools. To be quite honest, it was fantastic to listen to the member for Kew, for the first time that I had ever heard, actually touching on the lives of government school kids. It was refreshing and it was great to hear. It did not take long for her to come back to basically her 1 wood and start talking about the plight of these private schools in her electorate, one of which she went to, that charge kids \$30,000 to \$35,000 a year.

Sam Groth: Speaker, the Hawks are up by 16, and that is more than the number of people in this chamber. I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to previous rulings around the establishment of quorum. There are a number of rulings, and I will cite probably the most relevant one, by Acting Speaker Morris:

Exercising discretion not to ring the bells. Where a quorum had been called and a number of other quorums had already been called that day, the Chair exercised discretion in accordance with previous rulings not to ring the bells.

I suggest, if further quorums are rung, that the precinct has a quorum and the bells should not be rung.

The SPEAKER: I will take that into consideration, as will the Acting Speakers.

Dylan WIGHT: It is a sad day for the opposition when you have got the member for Nepean running the house, or running their side of the house. I did not know he could count to 21.

I will continue. It was refreshing to hear the member for Kew speak about government schools for legitimately the first time that I have ever heard. She stood there and she did well to get to 30 minutes, and I respect it. She stood there and she chastised the Minister for Education for going to the federal government to get an extra \$2.5 billion for Victorian schools, like it was a bad thing. It was absolutely bizarre. I make the point to the shadow minister for private schools that the only reason that we had to do that is because we had 10 years of a Liberal government that gave our government schools absolutely nothing. So the Minister for Education went and, incredibly successfully and fantastically, got an extra \$2.5 billion for public schools right here in Victoria. I will also make the point to the member for Kew that for three to four years, maybe three years of that time of a Liberal federal government that gave Victorian public schools nothing, it was her mentor Josh Frydenberg that was the Treasurer. So if she was so concerned about federal funding into public schools in Victoria at the time, she should have spoken to her mate Josh.

As I said at the outset, it is an absolutely fantastic opportunity for me to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting kids – schoolkids, public schoolkids – and also families in my electorate of Tarneit. The \$400 school saving bonus is an absolutely fantastic initiative that has come out of this Allan Labor government. I am a dad myself; I have got two kids in primary school, so I have had the pleasure of going to school uniform shops and watching families pimp their kids out in brand new school uniforms. I have had the opportunity to talk to principals and to schools in my electorate about how much this means. Recently I visited The Grange, a fantastic P-12 school. I visited their secondary campus in Hoppers Crossing, and I actually visited them to talk about the YMCA Youth Parliament program. They wanted to bring me in to have a conversation with me, because The Grange is taking part in that program. As part of that conversation, I got to speak to a year 10 student, a young woman, who is taking part in this program, and I cannot wait to chair this when I do it, because she is absolute dynamite, a weapon, and they were all absolutely fantastic. I spoke to her, and she is one of seven children in her family. All seven are in school, in primary school and secondary college,

MOTIONS

1260

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

at The Grange – all seven. She does not come from a family of means, so that \$400 school saving bonus has meant that all seven kids have a brand new school uniform, they get to go to excursions and they have books. They get to participate in school, like families from electorates like Kew have been able to do for some time. It means that families like that in Hoppers Crossing can participate in school as others have been able to previously. It is one of the most fantastic initiatives that I have seen in the education space for some time.

Then we go to the school breakfast program. I have spoken about the school breakfast program in this chamber previously. Every single school in my electorate has a school breakfast club – apart from one, but that is a brand new school. The only reason they have not got one yet is because they do not have the student population yet, but they will take part in it next year. Why that is so important is not just because of convenience for parents, it is because a lot of those children in those schools without that program would go to school without breakfast. They would flat out just go to school without breakfast, and that was what was happening previously. That is why it is so important. It started in my electorate with generous people in my electorate just starting the breakfast clubs anyway, and then it rolled on from there.

What people need to know and what needs to be clear is that that is what is at stake in the 2026 election. If anyone thinks for a minute that those opposite – certainly not the member for Nepean, because he never would – will continue to have breakfast clubs in schools, will continue to have the school saving bonus and will even continue to have free kinder, they are kidding themselves. Those opposite have already said, Trump and Dutton like, that they will cut the public service – that they will cut and cut and cut. These are the programs that they will cut. That is what is in jeopardy at the 2026 election. The Liberal Party, as they always have, will make life harder for working families in Victoria because it is the only thing they know how to do. They will cut the breakfast club program, they will cut the school saving bonus and they will not build a brand new school ever in Tarneit, because they never have.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (22:07): It is a little bit mystifying. I wonder if the member for Kew actually lives in another state. The way she trashes Victorian school students and their performance et cetera is pretty galling. I think it is important that we actually put the correct outcomes on the record, because it certainly is an indictment coming from her mouth of Victorian schools and teachers and the like. It is pretty insulting, to say the least. I am happy to correct the record on many fronts. I will say also that we are on track to have 100 new schools built by 2026. How many schools did they build when they were in? How many was it? Zero. If you are looking at comparing the record – zero versus 100 – on any mathematical spectrum we can see that we are actually doing great things collectively with the Victorian community and are certainly delivering.

I have had the pleasure of seeing and being at the opening of a number of these fantastic schools, even in my own electorate. We have got South Melbourne Park Primary School. We have got South Melbourne Primary School. The upgrade of Albert Park College preceded me. It is an absolutely outstanding school in our electorate. It is absolutely fantastic, the calibre of education we have got. Port Melbourne Secondary College was also built by our government. We know that Middle Park Primary School are at the design phase. They are going to have fantastic upgrades at their school. I know Albert Park Primary School had a church on their site, and that has been rebuilt into a beautiful performance space. I have actually been there. It is absolutely fantastic. I have been to many of the wonderful performances at that school.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: No performance from me, just a little bit of congratulation, the Premiers' Reading Challenge – that kind of thing. It has been absolutely fantastic to see the beautiful singing and dancing and other things that the kids do at that school.

It is a little bit galling. She was talking about the NAPLAN results. I just want to again correct the record. We can see if we go back to 14 August 2024:

MOTIONS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1261

Victorian students have again achieved outstanding NAPLAN results – leading the nation and recording improvements across a range of metrics.

This is in stark contrast to what the member for Kew was asserting. The 2024 national data shows Victorian students are leading the nation in a range of metrics, particularly in the primary years. Victorian year 3 students continue to lead the nation in both reading and numeracy, the most important foundational skills. This is the third consecutive year this has been achieved. Who knew? If we had listened to the member for Kew, we would have thought they were absolutely tanking, but that is not what the results show. Victorian primary school students continue to produce the best results in the country, ranking first or second in eight out of 10 domains, more than any other state or territory. Victorian students in years 3, 7 and 9 improved their 2023 reading results, reversing the national trend, which saw the average score for reading decline in years 3, 5 and 7 and improve only in year 9. Victoria's reading performance improved overall in 2024, with 5000 more students reaching the 'exceeding proficiency' level for reading across all year levels compared to 2023.

This year Victoria's NAPLAN participation rate was the highest it has been – and I should just say that was 2024, just to be clear about that reference – since the first year of testing in 2008. More than 95 per cent of students in years 3, 5 and 7 sat the reading test and more than 91 per cent sat the year 9 reading test. In total 311,000 Victorian students participated across years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in 2024. Despite Victoria's strong results, there is always room for improvement, absolutely; hence the introduction of the mandatory use of phonics in primary school from 2025. Here we are now, and we know we are accelerating that.

We are even accelerating this. I do not know if you all got to see – I am pretty proud – that South Melbourne Primary School hit the news because they are performing so well in phonics. They are really ahead of time. You have to brag. When you see these students and the teachers, Noel Creece, the principal, should be so very proud of what is going on at that school. It is absolutely transformative. But of course we are rolling this out across the state, working together with the teachers to deliver the best possible literacy outcomes because that is really an equaliser, isn't it? I think I referred to this earlier in the day. Making sure that, irrespective of what challenges individual students may have with disadvantage or otherwise, the school is making sure that every student gets the same opportunity to achieve their best. I am really excited about it. I have seen a lot of it live and I have seen just the difference it makes for these students, and I have had parents reflect back to me that they can see the difference as well. That is really satisfying, because at the end of the day they want their kids to get equitable opportunities.

I did want to talk about a theme that is certainly part of the motion that we are speaking to today, and that is the free healthy breakfast program. I know myself that I cannot even function without breakfast. I do not mean to make too much laughter and light of that, but seriously I cannot focus and by mid-morning nothing is going to happen. So I can only imagine there are kids who, but for this investment by our government, would be quite significantly compromised in their capacity to learn and engage. Also, I have to say there must be a feeling of isolation, because if you are not able to do what other kids are able to do, your peers, then it is only natural that you are going to feel a sense of being the other. We are working exactly against that because we want to make sure that every child feels included and is included, so it is not just also about feeling, it is about actualisation. I know another thing the Minister for Police was commenting on was that the free breakfast programs enable everyone to connect and eat together, and that is also a very important mechanism – a sense of unity, a sense of inclusion and a sense of an equal pathway in life, not being compromised because of whatever disadvantage or other challenges you may be facing in your life.

I should also say that public schools are free, and they will stay that way. No child can be disadvantaged or refused instruction regardless of payment. Our focus is making sure that all Victorian students can get a great education at a great school backed by full and fair funding, so we will not let any child miss out on the things that make the Victorian education great. We are giving families the

MOTIONS

1262

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

flexibility to use their \$400 school saving bonus on the things they need, from sports to camps, excursions, textbooks and uniforms.

I had the great pleasure of joining the member for Hastings and going out to chat to some of the lovely parents out at Langwarrin. It was really wonderful to see how meaningful the school saving bonus was for parents there, and they were being really strategic in a really positive way. Some were spending part of the funding on uniforms, and others were saving up ready for the school camps and making sure that their kids could all take part – although we do also have our school camps and excursions program, which again is really true to our Labor values, and that is making sure that we have absolute equity and no child misses out, because that can reinforce a feeling of unworthiness. We are counteracting that, and we are making sure every Victorian child knows their worth, knows we are there for them, knows that they will get fed – they can get breakfast – and knows that they will have the ability to participate in camps and excursions.

Actually, I have had some other lovely feedback. I think one of the members for Ballarat was saying there were kids who in the past may not have been able to access new uniforms and for the first time ever they have been able, through the school saving bonus, to have new uniforms and really wear those uniforms with pride and, again, feel part of the collective, really connected, and recognise their worth, which I think is really important.

I was quite astonished with the member for Kew, and I do want to reiterate a point that was made by the member for Tarneit. We know that in January 2025 the Victorian government and the Commonwealth reached an in-principle agreement to increase Commonwealth funding for government schools from 20 per cent to 25 per cent over 10 years. The inference was – well, I do not know, it was very confusing – that we should not be trying to get our fair share. So what was the Minister for Education supposed to do – just sit back and say, ‘Oh well, let’s just see where it lands. If we get less than the other states, it does not matter’? No. On the contrary, the Minister for Education was in there fighting all the way and did manage to increase the share that we get of the national pie. Isn’t that his job? Also, he is doing it because it is the right thing to do and because that is who he is – that is where his values are. He is making sure that Victoria gets its fair share. So I do not know why the member for Kew does not want us to get our fair share and did not think the Minister for Education should be fighting for that. It is really, really confusing and it actually concerns me, because if the wheels were reversed, would she fight for a fair share for Victoria? I do not know. I do not have confidence in that. But thank goodness we have the Minister for Education that we do, who recognises the importance of Victoria having a fair share of the pie, fought for it and has actually increased what we are getting for our great state of Victoria.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (22:17): I am delighted to make a contribution on this motion. I was raised by two educators who I inherited my Labor values from, and when I think about particularly the school breakfast program, I think about my mother, who taught in the public education system for 30 years and would often make lunch for kids at school and bring it along and provide that to the children that needed a feed without anyone noticing. This is the work that we know that our teachers do every single day, whether it is deodorant or, perhaps in the past, tampons or pads or school lunches. But not anymore, because this government is doing the things that we need to do to make sure that our littlest learners, our youngest Victorians, have every opportunity to learn, and you cannot learn with an empty stomach.

I think about when I was first elected, and one of the most powerful things I saw was the school breakfast program in action at Glengala Primary School, which is now in the member for Laverton's electorate. I am so fortunate to have schools in my community where the school breakfast program destigmatises food poverty. For kids to be able to turn up before school, have a game of basketball, have some Weet-Bix or something to eat and grab some fruit for the day ahead is really just fundamental and I think the bare minimum we can do to make sure that every young person, no matter what their postcode is, no matter what their parents earn, has the opportunity to go to school with a full tummy.

I am very grateful that my mother when I was a child spoke to me about these issues and that she made me aware that there were children who were not as well off or as fortunate as our family. I think they were probably pretty lucky to have a teacher like my mum. Over the last 12 months over 100 new schools have joined the school breakfast program, taking the total number of schools to over 1100, and we have served more than 52 million breakfasts. I am very proud that Foodbank in my electorate of Footscray, based in Yarraville, are putting together the packs that go out to the schools.

I love that we are bringing back programs such as the dental program as well. I know that sometimes as a parent you receive so many Compass messages that you often go, 'What is this one?' Well, today I got a Compass message telling me that the Smile Squad were heading to my children's school. I know that last week they were at the Western English Language School next door to Footscray City Primary School, and for many of these children it is their first interaction with a dentist. I know it was my son's first interaction with a dentist. He came home with his little pack – with his toothbrush and his toothpaste – and he is benefiting from the same program that I benefited and many of us benefited from. I think there was a giraffe involved; it is stretching my memory.

A member interjected.

Katie HALL: Harold, of course. I have a story about Harold to speak to the member for Broadmeadows about later. It involves Golden Plains, it involves a tribute to Harolds and it involves both the wonderful Harold from *Neighbours* and Harold from the dental program. Anyway, I digress. The hour is late.

A member interjected.

Katie HALL: There has got to be another Harold. One of the things I really care about and why I remember the Labor Party and why I inherited the values that my parents raised me with is because I believe in equity of access, and I think that the school breakfast program, the school dental program and the \$400 school saving bonus are just such incredible things. It was such a lovely thing on the first day of school to arrive at school, even though we had the morning rush where I was saying, 'Where are your shoes? Where's your top? Why do you have three jumpers and no shorts?' We turned up at school and there were so many children in beautiful new school uniforms. I think it is a really wonderful thing, and it really does help.

In addition to the camps and excursions fund, there are so many ways that this government is making sure that every child can participate fully in high-quality public education, and state schools are great schools. I really just think that every student who goes to their local state school – that is the way that our society should be, that we have great local schools. Every school is fantastic. I know in my community we have invested in the capital infrastructure we need so that the teachers and the students have the beautiful facilities that they deserve. I know at Footscray High, as an example, we have spent more than \$100 million across the three campuses, and of course Footscray High was not always in existence. There was a period of time where it did not exist because it was shut down.

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Katie HALL: That is right, member for Narre Warren North. It was shut down in the 1990s when the Kennett government closed Footscray High on Wembley Avenue in Yarraville. The Labor government has brought it back and it is thriving, and it is something that the families of Melbourne's inner west really wanted and needed and deserved. Whether you are a student at Footscray North Primary School, Footscray Primary School or Footscray City Primary School, you have seen major capital upgrades so that you have got the beautiful facilities to learn in as well as fantastic programs like the school breakfast program, the Smile Squad and of course the \$400 school saving bonus.

Sam Groth: Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): There have been several quorums called. It has been established that there is a quorum on the precinct. We will not be ringing the bells any further.

MOTIONS

1264

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

Katie HALL: We have had major capital upgrades across the inner west of Melbourne, but the thing that is most important to me is that whatever direction your child wants to go in, whether they want to become a musician or whether they want to become perhaps a specialist in agriculture – we have a farm at Footscray High – we invest in these opportunities for our young people and that public education is as good as it can be. I am very proud to be a Labor member of Parliament, a member of the Labor Party, because I joined the Labor Party when I was 15 because I saw what the Kennett government was doing to local schools. I inherited my mother's passion and my father's passion for social justice and for equity of access, and now it is a real privilege to be a part of the government that is delivering that for children in Melbourne's inner west. The transformation from when I was in high school to now is just extraordinary. My mum taught at Maidstone Primary School –

Steve McGhie: Great school.

Katie HALL: Yes, that is right, member for Melton. It does not exist anymore. My father attended Footscray North Primary School and Maribyrnong High School. These are great local state schools, and it really warms my heart to see many of these schools now celebrating a hundred years of educating young people in Melbourne's inner west.

Juliana Addison (Wendouree) (22:27): Acting Speaker Walters, to see another teacher, another former teacher, in the chair is very, very good. We are always teachers, like you are always an Olympian. I just want to say to the member for Footscray that my grandmother taught at Footscray. She was a teacher in Footscray during the Depression, and she had some incredible stories. She was a woman who went to Melbourne University in the 1920s, and as soon as she finished she went out to Footscray and taught there. There are generations of teachers in my family, and I am very proud to talk about being a teacher today and the contribution that teachers make. I look around, and whether it is the member for Greenvale, the member for Frankston, the member for Monbulk, who was just here, the member for Werribee – I think we have heard he is a teacher. Does everyone know the member for Werribee is a schoolteacher? I have heard that.

A member interjected.

Juliana Addison: Firefighters and schoolteachers. It is with this great love of education and strong understanding of education that it is an absolute privilege tonight to be able to get up to support the motion that this house recognises the Allan Labor government's commitment to working families by expanding free breakfast clubs, saving parents \$400 through the school saving bonus and extending the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, ensuring that every student has access to essential programs no matter what their circumstances. If something wants to be emblematic of the Labor Party, this motion is. This is about our values. This is about who we are. This is about equity. This is about education being a game changer. I am really, really pleased that the Legislative Council has provided me with this opportunity tonight at 10:30 to talk about this issue that I am so passionate about. I am indebted to the Legislative Council, and I thank them for the work that they are doing which allows me to do this. I also note the member for Sunbury, another former teacher, is in the house, so I am in excellent company. They say you are judged by the company you keep, and when I think about the teachers in the Labor caucus and the people who are children of teachers or partners of teachers – I know the Minister for Equality's husband is a teacher – there are a lot of teachers in here, and all our kids have been taught by them, so it is great.

We have really done a lot when we talk about the Education State. Victoria is known for being the Education State, and it is a real disappointment to me that the shadow opposition is not proud of the Education State. She does not get it. She does not understand what we are doing and what our vision is. This is a vision that has been around since 2015, a vision of the former great education minister, and that is James Merlino, our former Deputy Premier. His leadership on education was really the driver for the Education State.

MOTIONS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1265

When we look at it, it is not just about infrastructure. It is about the whole package, the whole student, and it is about mental health and supporting our students who struggle with mental health. We know that is such an issue for students in Victoria and around Australia and the world – we know that with our GPs in schools program. I am going to talk a lot about how important it is that we make sure our kids get good nutritious breakfasts, because we know that that is a really important part of school. And there is my love of school camps. I got to go on school camps, and I will talk about camps as well.

But let us go back to our state's proud history, because tonight is all about history. I will not go back as far as others, but I will go back to 1872, when the Education Act 1872 was introduced. In doing so, prior to Federation, Victoria was the first colony to offer free, secular and compulsory education, leading all of the colonies, like we always do. We are the leaders of our nation. We set agendas, and then the others follow. I am really proud that education is one that we are doing. One hundred and fifty years on, we are seeing that with our government: the very proud Allan Labor government's commitment to free, secular and compulsory education continues. We do have a really, really strong vision of what we want to achieve with the Education State, and it is to deliver excellence in every classroom in every school in every part of the state. Importantly, this vision has been created with parents, with stakeholders and with school leaders. Once again, James Merlino, our education minister from 2014 to 2022, made it the number one priority of our state, because what is more important for a state than our future? That is what this is all about.

When we look at that, we have to say: how do we build the Education State? A part of it is infrastructure. We have talked about the Kennett school closures that shut down schools in my community. People still mourn those schools. But guess what, we are making sure that no matter where you live, whether it is in metropolitan Melbourne or in regional or rural Victoria, you will get a great public school education thanks to the Education State. Just in my electorate alone we have had serious infrastructure investment. At Ballarat High School we have the JJ Sheehan building. JJ Sheehan was a member of this place. He was a proud Labor member of this place in the 1950s, after the split in 1955. Sadly, we lost the seat of Ballarat back then. He went back on the tools and became principal of Ballarat High and was one of the greatest principals ever of Ballarat High – a Labor man who lived his values, whether it was in this chamber or whether it was teaching kids in Ballarat. I have been so fortunate to have my children educated by his kids. Kate Sheehan was my kids' kindergarten teacher. There is this lovely synergy of living in a local community; JJ's daughter taught my daughters. It is something I am really proud of.

Mount Rowan Secondary College is something we are so proud of. The member for Ripon is also in the catchment area, with Miners Rest, Creswick and Clunes. In the heart of Wendouree we have just built the most beautiful building, with new STEM classrooms. It is a game changer. This school continues to grow. The reputation of the school continues to grow. I thank the leadership there of Seona Murnane and Nick Stephen, who are doing an outstanding job and making that school one that we can all be proud of. At Phoenix College there are the new sports facilities, with basketball courts. What I love when we invest in our schools is that we are investing in the community. My daughter gets to play basketball at Phoenix College; we bring the community into Phoenix College, the old Sebas Tech. It used to be a pretty rough and tough school, but now as Phoenix College it is literally rising from the ashes. It is a great school. We bring the whole community in there for basketball on a Monday night and Friday night, because when you invest in state schools, you invest in communities. That is what this is all about.

We have done amazing work at Black Hill and Macarthur Street. Macarthur Street has the best primary school toilets I have ever seen. They are amazing; I love them. We have refurbished the Forest Street Primary admin and classroom, and my very favourite project, the Delacombe Primary School stadium, is a \$6 million world-class stadium. We announced it in 2018 and we delivered it on time and under budget, and once again we have community groups, whether it is the local cheerleaders or basketball teams or touch football, all using this facility around the clock, as well as the school getting to access it. One of my favourite things when I was visiting Delacombe Primary School was that parents of kids

MOTIONS

1266

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

at that school were constructing the new gym, and kids who had been at that school were apprentices and tradies on that job, because that is what happens when you invest in our schools; you invest in the community, you create jobs, you support the local economy and everyone is a winner.

I have got to talk about breakfast clubs, because we have had over 40 million breakfasts served, and we are going to keep serving those up. I have had the opportunity to go to Yuille Park and make scrambled eggs and serve pancakes. Do you know what is great about Yuille Park? Like so many, it brings the parents and the kids together. Once again it is all about community – it is about parents and carers connecting and supporting our kids – and it makes a real difference. We are going to extend that. We announced in the last budget we are extending it for more schools. So welcome, Ballarat North Primary School, you are getting a breakfast club as well. We are going to make sure that all our schools are going to have access to it.

I have talked too much about all these other great things. I want to say thank you to the families who have gone out and accessed the school saving bonus in my community. I have got the figure; I have got to get it right. \$1.657 million has remained in the pockets and the wallets of people in Wendouree – \$1.657 million that they have spent on textbooks and school uniforms, as well as back-to-school expenses. We know how hard it is. I know that even when I go to schools now principals are saying the kids are loving their uniforms because they are not wearing hand-me-down ones. They have been able to get brand new uniforms. They are so proud of their uniforms. Uniforms are the great equaliser, and that is what it is all about. It is about saying to every kid, ‘Welcome, you’re a part of a group, you’re a part of a team. It doesn’t matter what your household income is. You are welcome. You’re a part of our school.’ I support this motion. I recommend it to the house.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (22.37): I was at Dallas primary school when we had the 25 millionth school breakfast, and it was just so lovely to be there. I was with the then Minister for Education. That school has had a school breakfast program for a long time; the parents volunteer. They even have a bus that picks up schoolkids to get them to the breakfast program, and that makes a huge difference to getting kids to school in a fairly disadvantaged part of Melbourne where there are a lot of complexities with families and a lot of needs. Dallas primary school does an incredible job making sure every kid gets the opportunities and the advantages that going to school every day on a full tummy brings you. Breakfasts will now be available in every school, and I am really proud of our government doing that.

We have also got the \$400 bonus for kids in every state school as well, and I really want to thank the admin staff for the work that they have put into that to make sure families can access the help with uniforms, books and activities for kids. We have got the Glasses for Kids program. We have got the free dental program, which is just a game changer. Dental health is often overlooked, and it is one of the most preventable forms of hospitalisation, particularly for under-5s, and I am so glad that we have got that dental program. The Get Active Kids vouchers are awesome too and make a huge difference to a lot of families in my electorate. We have also got free GPs in schools, and I was at the Hume secondary college with the minister when that was announced. It is another program I am really proud of, making sure kids have got access to GPs in their schools who can deal with a lot of health issues, particularly early when you have got that access. Dallas primary also has the early years program.

So many schools in my electorate have been upgraded. I just want to go through them all. There was \$497,000 for Broadmeadows Preschool for an upgrade there. These were all done to prepare for the free three- and four-year old kinder, which is nation leading and means that kids have that extra help in those early years and get all of the advantages of their schooling. There was \$641,000 for Gowrie Primary School; \$794,000 for Meadows Primary kinder; \$524,000 to upgrade Dallas kinder; \$1.35 million for the Holy Child kinder, which is a gorgeous little kinder, and I was really pleased to open that with the minister at the time; \$1.5 million for the Upfield kinder; \$370,000 for the Fawkner Primary kinder; \$1.4 million for the Glenroy Central kinder; and \$1.6 million for the Glenroy Hub Children’s Centre. That is another building I am really proud of as well. That is part of the Glenroy library project, a project we started when I was on council. We bought the land, and I was part of the

plan there to put the neighbourhood house, the kinder, maternal and child health, child care, library, learning spaces, a health centre and all of those things that work great together, and of course it is set in the beautiful Bridget Shortell Reserve, so it is a wonderful hub for Glenroy and a project I am really proud of. We also have \$1.4 million at Glenroy West kinder, \$1.6 million at Will Will Rook Preschool and \$640,000 at Bellevue kinder, and we are about to open the new Oak Park kinder. There has been incredible investment in kinders in my electorate.

I want to talk about Wimbi, the new early learning centre, government run and government owned, one of the first of 50, and it was opened at Fawkner recently with the Premier and the Minister for Children. It was very exciting, and it is just a beautiful centre. It is set right adjacent to Moomba Park Primary School, a wonderful little primary school, and I was there with the Deputy Premier just a couple of weeks ago. When I was there last time, when we turned the sod on the early years centre, I asked one of the kids 'What do you need here?', and he said, 'We need more soccer balls.' So I went and got some soccer balls, and it was so great to drop them off. So now they have also got more soccer balls. That is nothing compared to the investment we put into the Wimbi early years centre. Government-run and government-owned child care is really important, and it is high quality and we know that our kids are getting the best start there.

We have also got free TAFE of course, which is an incredible thing for helping with the cost of living. Education has always been my number one priority, even though I am not a teacher – there are so many teachers in here. I am not a teacher, but I do very much value education. It was really great to open the new \$60 million Health and Community Centre of Excellence at Kangan Institute in Broadmeadows with the Premier again recently. You might have seen the building go up on Dimboola Road. It is just incredible, and there are over 36 free TAFE courses running there, including nursing, building and construction, early childhood, community services, allied health, dental, IT, accounting, aged care, animal studies, engineering, cookery, concreting, hospitality, mental health, horticulture, alcohol and drugs, youth work, vet nursing and cybersecurity. That is on top of what it offers in jobs in construction, plumbing and the electrical jobs we need for the future.

I have also been advocating for a university in Melbourne's north. It is a pretty long way from Bundoora to Footscray, and it was great to have the federal government and local government on board. We all work together. Basem Abdo, the candidate for Calwell, proudly announced a new university hub in Broadmeadows, which is a real winner for our community. We also got \$3.3 million from the feds for a rescoping of all of the things we can do in Broadmeadows, the plans there. That is really exciting, and I thank Basem for his support there.

We have got a new tech school coming up. That was an election commitment of mine, and that is in Broadmeadows. Construction is about to begin there. Again, that is an incredible benefit to my local community. We have got full funding for government schools, and I am really proud of the federal Labor government for funding that. That is also a game changer and something we have been working on for a long time, and I thank the Minister for Education for his advocacy on that.

Of course there is so much investment in my other local schools. I have got a huge list here. I think I need more than 10 minutes, which I never like talking for, but I will keep talking. We have the \$20 million Broadmeadows Special Developmental School upgrade, and I am really proud of our government's investment in special schools. All of mine have had big upgrades. Everybody deserves a good education.

It was great to be out at Broadmeadows Special Developmental School recently, and we did the mini Woolies program. That is a program where Woolworths comes in and helps the kids learn retail skills so that they can get jobs. I did not unionise them yet, but that will be my next move. It was great and the kids were having such a fun time. I was talking to Malaak, and she is a wonderful school leader. She was just so happy to have us there and have new skills to learn and skills that will help with employment. She is really excited about the new \$20 million rebuild there as well.

MOTIONS

1268

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

Glenroy West Primary I used to walk past every day as a kid. They are great for active travel. I was with the Deputy Premier there to open the \$21 million upgrade to the primary school, with three new learning areas linked to outdoor classrooms and a new outdoor play and learning area, plus \$1.4 million for the kinder, which I mentioned earlier.

I am really proud of the election commitment I was able to get committed to, and that is \$14.5 million to upgrade John Fawkner College, delivering new classrooms and world-class science, technology, arts and food technology buildings. Anthony and I have been working really closely on a lot of our schools together and on the northern Merri-bek education plan. It is great to work with you, Acting Speaker Walters, as well on the schools that border our northern boundaries. I am really proud of what we have been able to achieve at John Fawkner College.

I was at Glenroy College yesterday, which had a \$9.5 million upgrade that the previous member for Pascoe Vale had advocated for. It was great to see that come through. They are just such a wonderful school. I was there last night. We had an iftar, and they had an Easter celebration. It is a beautiful community and I really love going there. The new principal is doing a great job and the staff are doing a wonderful job.

We had a \$12 million upgrade for Hume Valley School, and that looks wonderful. I am also really proud of our government's investment in after-school and school holiday programs for kids at special schools. It makes a huge difference to families; it means that they can work full time. Previously if you could not get your kids into school holiday programs or into after-school activities, it was pretty hard to work full time. So I am really proud of our Labor investment in special schools there. We had a \$10.8 million upgrade and modernisation at Jacana School for Autism. I will leave it there.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (22:47): At this late hour I have been enduring the various members from the other side prattling on about how they cook eggs and go and provide free breakfasts and the missioning that they do in their schools. But I want to talk tonight about the failures of this government in looking after education, particularly in those communities that only have one school. Many of the Labor members up speaking tonight probably come from communities where families get real choice, where families can actually go to schools and get a choice. But out in the country you only get one school, and that school should be a high-quality one. It should be one that provides opportunity and choices for the students – but not out in Polwarth, not out in country Vic. It is a sad reflection on the last 10 years of Labor.

The average non-attendance rate at the schools in my electorate is somewhere between 40 and 60 per cent of students not attending regularly. That is a shameful example and reflection of the complete and utter neglect of this government in actually looking after the real welfare of students. It is all very well to say, 'Oh, we're funnelling all this money into breakfast,' but when the kids do not even get to school to have the breakfast, that is a problem. That is a problem that this government has refused to address. There are no active programs for working towards and minimising truancy in regional communities. If you do not turn up to the school in your country town, no-one goes to find you and no-one goes to find out why you are not there, and there is no support for those schools, those principals or those teachers to help get the kids to school and keep them at school. It is an indictment of the way that this government has lost focus on what is actually important. You can have all the breakfast programs you like, but it does not matter because kids are not even getting to school. This government has done nothing to improve the attendance rate at schools in the electorate of Polwarth – not one skerrick – in the 10 years I have been there.

Worse still, the principals of the schools are gagged from talking about this problem in their community, and that is a real problem. This government are so afraid of allowing active and robust discussion about the educational outcomes in small, regional communities that they actually gag principals. When a Liberal Party member calls the principals together for a meeting and asks, 'What can we do as a community to get more kids to school more often?' the Department of Education rings up. They do not ring up and say, 'Well done on your breakfast program,' they say, 'Don't you start

MOTIONS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1269

talking about the fact that our system is failing. Don't you dare be caught talking about that.' That is what this government does. If they put as much effort into getting better outcomes for kids as they put into silencing the truth, we would all be a lot better off.

But it is worse than that. If you have a school that is under-resourced and not able to deal with the complex needs of its students and the students do not turn up, wouldn't you think you would work actively to try and have more choices for those kids and find out why they cannot go to school and what is stopping them from attending. No, they do not do that. In my electorate I have probably got most of schools somewhere between 30 and 40 minutes apart, which you would think is not too far, but it requires bus transport and a lot of coordination. In many cases dangerous, poorly maintained roads separate the various towns. For example, one of the state's only remaining technical schools is in Cobden, geographically smack bang in the centre of the Polwarth electorate. If that is the only secondary school experience providing a trade, manual and skills-based education, wouldn't you think a progressive government that was interested in helping kids to take up those learning opportunities would actually allow the kids to go from one town to another to take up those opportunities. It would not be that difficult. No, not this government, because it is more interested in protecting union outcomes and the outcomes for teachers than it is in allowing kids to go to the school that is going to provide them with the best and fairest opportunity, and that is an indictment.

In the case of some of my towns, where we have in recent reporting periods 60 per cent non-attendance, you might ask the question: if those kids had an opportunity to go to another school that actually provided them with the education that was relevant to them, would we in fact get them turning up more often? I would say the chances would probably be greatly improved, but that is not how this government sees it. It is getting worse than that still, because we have now got schools that are practically empty. I refer to one school in particular, a P-12. It only has eight students enrolled that actually live in that community. Instead, under some sort of convoluted system, that school is now using its rare and scarce resources to bus kids who have higher needs from another community into their school to try and bolster their numbers. They are not doing it for the best educational outcomes for kids, they are doing it to try and maintain the numbers at the school. You might be able to mount the argument for that, but there are a lot of kids that live in that community. The school has deteriorated such that their parents are driving them 50 minutes into Apollo Bay to another school that is doing really well, that is well funded and well supported, and they are going to that other school. Instead of having good local, easily accessible education, parents are having to drive on dangerous roads in multiple cars to take their kids to another community because the department has fundamentally failed in its obligation to make sure the education being offered in that community is relevant and meets the needs of that community.

Colin Brooks interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: I am more than happy to tell you which school, but I do not wish to shame that particular school or community. But look at a map. If the minister would like to meet me afterwards, I would be more than happy to share that with him, because it is certainly not being listened to by the department. The entire parent community board has left. They have all left. They have all taken their students to another school. This sort of thing goes on and what does the department do? What does this government do? What does this minister do? They remain deaf to the voices and the concerns of the community, and they allow these poor outcomes to continue.

There needs to be a focus on quality education and on meeting the needs of the communities that the students belong to. This is the great shame of what this government have done, because they are very, very happy to talk about the various programs that they are implementing and, as I said earlier, they are very happy to turn up and cook bacon and eggs and whatever else they have prattled on about tonight. But are they sitting there and looking at the communities and the students and asking the question: are the kids in this community getting a fair deal? No, they are absolutely not getting a fair deal. They are being overlooked because this government is prioritising every other aspirational ideal that it has but the fundamentals of helping a kid feel comfortable and turning up as regularly as they

MOTIONS

1270

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

possibly can to actually get an education, because you do not get an education if you do not turn up to school. That needs to be an absolute focus, and when this government refuses to address that, it is a great concern.

I looked at the member for Mordialloc, and he is aware that we actually had a very fine investment in my community's special development school. It does not come easy to me to praise the government, but that particular case is a good example. So there is evidence that the state can do a good job, but that is only one out of 40-odd schools in my community where the government has had a focus. It is to the detriment of everybody else, because the previous school that those students were in is now sitting idle while 90 students with high needs and special needs are enrolled and being taught in containers and portable units on another site. This government has allowed the vacant school site to sit empty with the prospect of being demolished for some harebrained project that is unfunded and still not even known to the public while these 90 kids with high needs – we are talking about young mums, we are talking about kids with drug and alcohol addiction that are being cared for by others – are being taught in containers and portable units. This government sits here tonight and goes on about its breakfast clubs, and yet the most vulnerable people in my community are still being neglected and not thought about.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (22:57): As I rise at this late hour – it is nearly 11 pm and we are fast approaching midnight – I would like to take a moment to thank the hardworking staff at Parliament, the clerks and the catering team, who are keeping us all fed late into the evening. I know we also have a lot of hardworking staff in our ministerial offices and electorate offices. I want to thank them as well, in particular my own hardworking electorate officer Ashlee, who is keenly watching proceedings from her home right now, and I am sure the rest of my hardworking electorate team will be downloading this video in the morning. It truly is a pleasure to rise and speak on the motion before the house:

That this house recognises the Allan Labor government's commitment to working families by expanding free breakfast clubs, saving parents \$400 through the school saving bonus and extending the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, ensuring every student has access to essential programs, no matter their circumstances.

This motion speaks not only to the work that the Allan Labor government is doing when it comes to providing real cost-of-living relief for hardworking Victorian families but also about education and Victorian schools, which is probably my favourite thing to talk about here. Those opposite may complain that education is something we spend too much time talking about or that we focus too much on Victorian schools or that we talk too much about the incredible schools that we are upgrading in our electorates – and we are so proud of those achievements. But that is just what happens when you have a state Labor government – a Labor government that values public education, a Labor government that values teachers and educators, a Labor government that understands the transformative role of education in people's lives and a Labor government that wants to give every single Victorian child the best possible start in life.

This does not happen by accident, and it certainly does not happen by chance. It happens when you are a government that listens to teachers and educators and understands what they need, listens to school communities and understands what they need and elects teachers to represent the Victorian communities. We have no shortage of teachers on this side of the house. The member for Bellarine was a teacher, the member for Greenvale was a teacher and the member for Monbulk was a teacher, just to name a few. And of course the new member for Werribee was a teacher just a few short months ago. The member for Wendouree was a history teacher. I believe the member for Narre Warren South might have had a stint in teaching, and the member for Sunbury – gosh, there are a lot of members on this side who were teachers, aren't there? I believe the member for Frankston was a firefighter, but he might have also had a hand at teaching, perhaps, before that career.

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Ella GEORGE: And I'm not a teacher, but my mum was a teacher. She was a primary school teacher at what would be considered a low socio-economic school, where hardworking families

sometimes needed a little bit of extra help to ensure that their kids got the best start in life that they deserved. My mum told me about kids who did not have breakfast before they came to school, kids who did not bring any lunch with them, who had to rely on the generosity of their teachers to find them something to eat or pick up an extra sandwich during their lunchbreak. She told me about the impact on learning for those children who did not come to school with a full tummy, the impact it had on their ability to focus, to learn and to really get the most out of their education. I grew up with these stories from my mum, and it centred in me the importance of great public schools and great public education and the importance of great Labor governments, because only Labor will deliver great schools and a great curriculum.

You can have the best schools and the best teachers and the best curriculum, but we all know how hard it can be to learn on an empty stomach. That is exactly where our breakfast clubs come in, providing a free nutritious breakfast and, in many cases, providing fruit for extra snacks throughout the day. Since this program was established in 2016 the Labor government has invested over \$162 million in breakfast clubs. Across the state, when breakfast clubs are rolled out to every single government school by June next year, this will mean 600,000 students will have access to a free and healthy breakfast every single morning to have the best start to their day and set them up for a great day of learning. Right now we have over a thousand schools that have a free breakfast club. In the past year alone we have had another 100 schools sign up to this free program. School breakfast clubs have served 52 million meals, giving busy families one less thing to worry about in the mornings. Before we had breakfast clubs, one in five students would go to school without breakfast each day, and that is why we did something about it. All of the government schools across the Lara electorate are proudly home to breakfast clubs. I have spoken to many, many students, teachers and parents who volunteer at these breakfast clubs – parents who have told me just how incredible breakfast clubs are to them, not just as a place to pop in for breakfast but a place to connect with friends, have a chat before the day gets started and build relationships with one another. They have really become integral parts of school communities right across the state.

Going to school is so much more than learning how to read or write or how to do maths, which I will admit is not my strong point. I do not know my times table. I do not know how to do long division or short division actually. I can barely multiply. I pretty much need a calculator for everything. But what happens outside of the classroom – going on camps and excursions and other activities – can be just as important. Some of my fondest memories of school are from things like Camp Jungai in year 7, where we were thrown into a camp experience not knowing anyone – it was a new school for a lot of people – surviving Camp Jungai, surviving water activities and bushwalks and the like. I think it was in year 9 when we went to the Mitchell River for hiking and kayaking. That was one of the most enjoyable weeks of my life, and I still have so many fond memories from that week. I remember going to the zoo in primary school for amazing excursions. No student should have to miss out on these opportunities. That is exactly why we are continuing with our Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund.

I was so pleased to see the Premier and the Deputy Premier announce the continuation of this program in February this year at Wyndham Central College in the heart of the Werribee electorate. I hope the member for Werribee has a contribution to make on this motion later this evening, because as a former schoolteacher, he would see every single day how much the investments that the Labor government is making into things like breakfast clubs, into things like the school saving bonus and into the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund are changing the lives of students – students who need it. This year families of more than 200,000 students across the state will be able to access the support in the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund. That means \$154 for primary school students and \$256 for secondary school students.

These investments into breakfast clubs and the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund are on top of that \$400 school saving bonus, which every student in a government school right across Victoria is eligible for. I know that this means a saving of thousands of dollars for some large families in the Lara electorate. This is a huge financial support for families, covering the cost of uniforms, textbooks,

MOTIONS

1272

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

excursions and other activities. I can tell you, and I am pleased to share with the house, that this has been so well taken up across the Lara electorate. In fact, to date we have seen \$310,000 returned for the cost of textbooks, \$915,000 for the cost of uniforms and \$402,000 for the cost of activities, taking that to a total amount of \$1,628,000 that has been returned to hardworking families in the Lara electorate through the Allan Labor government's \$400 school saving bonus.

I am short on time, and I would be up here all night if I had the time to speak about the upgrades that have taken place in the schools across the Lara electorate. While I would like to claim credit for them all, I do want to acknowledge John Eren, the former member for Lara, and his hard work in securing an upgrade to every single school in the Lara electorate across his term. That is a remarkable achievement, and that is something that Labor members care about. That is something that Labor members will always fight for, to get their schools upgraded, because our schools deserve upgrades, and that is exactly what this Allan Labor government is about – supporting schools, supporting teachers, supporting families and supporting students. I commend this motion to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (23:07): At the core of this motion the government is seeking to congratulate itself for the provision of services to schools, no matter their circumstances. I start by saying that the Minister for Education has not yet spoken, but he is here in the chamber. I feel confident that after I speak, he will reply. He will reply and he will take the opportunity to speak to an education motion about the portfolio that he represents. He certainly would not want a motion about his own portfolio to be considered by this Parliament without taking the opportunity to speak. I feel certain that after I have spoken, he will speak next. In doing so I will raise a number of things for him to respond to which go to the point of the motion about the government providing funding no matter the circumstances. Well, 'no matter the circumstances' – isn't that interesting.

In my community the government at the last election committed, three years ago, to fund – and we were surprised; I will say we were surprised – two schools. We were surprised that they found some schools in our electorate to provide a commitment to. I do not know how they found them – it might have been by luck. I am sure it was my advocacy. But they found, finally, two schools and committed funding to them. The funding was committed three years ago, and guess how much money has been delivered of that commitment three years ago. I am taking punts here. How much money? Zero dollars. Can you believe it? Who would have thought that before an election Labor would promise little children money.

Ben Carroll interjected.

James NEWBURY: The minister just said, 'What was your margin?' It was close, and that is the point. At the last election the Labor government promised money because they thought it would impact the vote. And guess what happened? It certainly did not work for them, so after the election, as the minister has just admitted – no money for the schools. Can you believe that a government would promise little children funding and then deliver nothing? Can you believe it? How could you possibly do that to children? There are not just two schools that have been ripped off, there are 29. Twenty-nine schools have been promised money, and money has never been delivered. To be frank, I think it would have been more up-front for those schools to not have been promised money than to not tell the truth to them when that promise was given. I do acknowledge that it was not the current minister who made the promise. But he has inherited this portfolio, and I would say the least he could do is live up to the commitment to those little children.

Let me tell him about those schools, because he has not yet visited a school in my electorate. I can tell him about Hampton Primary School – \$9.8 million. Not real money, of course, because it has never come, but that was the election commitment back then.

Richard Riordan interjected.

James NEWBURY: That amount of money was going to be a game changer for my school, member for Polwarth, and build a fantastic facility at the front of the school and also help with the

MOTIONS

Thursday 20 March 2025

Legislative Assembly

1273

growing population of the local community, because Hampton is an area that the government have prioritised to densify. Now it is one of the 20-storey tower locations for this government.

None of the schools in the area have had an upgrade. Like everything else this government does, they promise towers for my community and then not one dollar for infrastructure, not one dollar for schools. Hampton Primary, as I said – \$9.8 million – a promise that has not been delivered and one of the 29. The other one is Gardenvale Primary School – \$11.7 million. It is a significant commitment but not real.

Tim Richardson interjected.

James NEWBURY: We matched it, member for Mordialloc, of course we did. And we would have delivered it. I feel very confident that the minister is going to respond to me and talk about those 29 schools and talk about the money that will flow to those schools and the commitment that will be delivered to them, because a promise made should be delivered, especially when it comes to kids. My schools know that this promise will be drawn out till the next election and the government will not live up to that commitment. They might promise another fake announcement at the election, but there is nothing worse than promising little children money and then not delivering on it.

If I can also mention, while I am speaking about the schools that have been promised money not delivered, one particular school that is in desperate need, while the minister is here, Brighton Primary School. Brighton Primary School has never had money. No-one in living memory can remember the state government providing proper capital funds to Brighton Primary School, and in Brighton people live a long time. At Brighton Primary we have more than half the school in demountables, and the independent federal member and I have campaigned together, which I appreciate is rare, on this particular issue, because at that school we have children with hearing deficiencies. It is one of the rare schools in the metro area that have kids with hearing deficiencies, and those demountables are next to the train line. These kids, who have serious hearing deficiencies, are being put in demountables next to a train line. You cannot tell me that if you are looking at schools that deserve infrastructure upgrades, that would not be at the top of your list. Set aside any promises made at any other schools. This is one of the rare locations in metro Melbourne that specifically houses and looks after and teaches kids with hearing deficiencies. The teachers at the school do an incredible job, and kids from the whole region who have hearing difficulties go there because they know they are going to a school with fantastic teachers who do a really great job, but they are in 50-year-old demountables directly next to a train line. The federal member and I did a video to illustrate the noise next to those demountables, and the noise is unbelievable. To think that these kids have not had the opportunity of infrastructure they deserve, especially when it is a school that provides a specialist hearing difficulty unit, is just appalling.

I know the minister is here. I am glad to know that he is, I take it, going to speak next on this motion, because I am sure he would not let this motion go without speaking on it. I mean, it is on his portfolio area, but 29 schools that were promised funding three years ago have been strung along for three years. The measure I hope of this minister is that he sets aside the poor decisions that were made previously and does the right thing by those kids, that he does the right thing and lives up to the commitments made, shows that they were not hollow commitments, they were not political, as the minister said before, but that they will be delivered, that they were not just about margins and that this government will deliver them. I invite the minister to now speak.

John LISTER (Werribee) (23:17): I am not angry with the member opposite; I am just disappointed. We should speak at a working volume in this place. Unfortunately the member who has just spoken, the member for Brighton, seems to forget that this place is about getting the job done and not just raising your voice in some way to act more convincing. As someone who taught persuasive techniques as recently as term 4 last year, I know volume is not one of those persuasive techniques when it comes to speaking. I would counsel the member to perhaps go back to year 10 English and consult the English curriculum which we are rolling out – Victorian curriculum 2.0 – something else that we are helping to bring into state, independent and private schools across Victoria.

MOTIONS

1274

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

However, I digress. I would like to support the motion that we recognise this government's commitment to working families by expanding programs like the free breakfast clubs, the school saving bonus and the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and ensuring that every student has access to essential programs no matter the circumstances. I am delighted to be able to speak on this motion because in my electorate, as the minister well knows, we have some amazing schools that run most of these programs. School breakfast clubs run in all of our primary schools and in fact all of our secondary schools as of this year, so I would like to give a shout-out to Little River Primary School and their principal Gavin Nelson, who does an amazing power of work for the small community out there in Little River; Manorvale Primary School and Brianna Morelli, who I note went to Manorvale Primary School and is now helping lead that school; Thomas Chirnside Primary School and Bev Thompson, who does great work there; Riverwalk Primary and Paris Spencer, the principal there who does the excellent work with her team; and Wyndham Park Primary and John Eskander, who I was at a professional development conference in term 4 with, and we were talking all about the school breakfast club and some of those other equity opportunities that this Labor government funds in my electorate. It is fantastic to be now in this place supporting it and making sure it gets done. There is Werribee Primary School and David Quinn down there with his team, doing great work just around the corner from my house as a true Werribee local.

I would also like to give a shout-out to Wyndham Central College. As someone who has been one of the school breakfast club coordinators at Wyndham Central College, I have been there early in the morning making cheese toasties. Sometimes we would even get some pikelets made; we had all sorts of condiments ready. One of the fantastic things about this program that we ran at Wyndham Central was that kids who came in had the opportunity to speak to their teachers quite often. There would be conflict in classrooms sometimes, and the best way to help resolve that is over food and to talk to those teachers –

Dylan Wight interjected.

John LISTER: breaking bread – and to break down those boundaries. Obviously this is fuel for the day, but it is also a good way of helping our classes be more cohesive.

I would also like to give a shout-out to the principal at Wyndham Central College, Leanne Gagatsis. I note that we made the announcement with the Premier and Deputy Premier about extending our fantastic Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and our \$400 school saving bonus at Wyndham Central College, where we met many of the staff with whom I have had the pleasure of going on many an excursion that these programs have helped run. I have been out to the Grampians, in fact, on one of the best year 11 outdoor ed camps that I think I have ever been on. I drove a bus – one of the important skills that you get as a teacher. We have all been there. If you work at a school, you end up becoming a bus driver, which is a great skill to have. I would also like to give a shout-out to Werribee Secondary College and Amanda Mullins, who leads the charge there. They also run a school breakfast club. The Deputy Premier and I have been to Manor Lakes P–12 recently – only about a month ago – to meet with their new executive principal Tori Mulligan to talk about the amazing work that Manor Lakes is doing.

There is Wyndham Vale Primary School and Chris Johns – an excellent team there. I have also been to Riverbend Primary with the Deputy Premier, a few months ago.

A member interjected.

John LISTER: Exactly. It is amazing support that we show for our new state schools that we are building. I would like to thank Lisa for taking us around and showing us their excellent literacy program funded by the Labor government. Also we went to Ngarri Primary School and met with Honey Stirling. I will be out there in a couple of weeks time to go and see the program that they are running. We have also visited and had a look at Laa Yulta in Mambourin, with Mark Zahra leading the charge there; Nganboo Borron School, down near Lollipop Creek, with Michele Marcu doing an

excellent job with her team there; and Walcom Ngarrwa Secondary College, with Bradley Moyle leading the charge as they move into having a year 9 cohort next year, which also runs one of our school breakfast clubs.

I know I am taking you on a bit of a tour of the Werribee electorate, but I would just like to reflect on something. Again, I love reflecting on the by-election. I was with the member for Nepean at Manor Lakes P-12 that morning, and I noted former Premier Jeff Kennett was there.

Dylan Wight interjected.

John LISTER: Yes, a school that he did not close. In fact we had to build it. 350 schools were closed by Mr Kennett. As much as I have respect for him as someone who has experience running governments, I think it is pretty disappointing to see someone at a brand new school handing out for the Liberal candidate when he closed 350 government schools. You see, this is the party that supports government schools.

Richard Riordan interjected.

John LISTER: Righto. Sorry, the member for Polwarth is being a bit noisy. Again, I am not angry with those opposite, just disappointed. We do not want to give away free lunches to rich bosses like the Liberals' mates in Canberra.

The member for Kew spoke a lot about teacher wages in their contribution. I think that is quite interesting. As someone who was very recently on teacher wages, I understand quite a lot. In fact I was also on my AEU sub-branch, and a shout-out to the AEU and the work they do. I hope the good comrade, the member for Kew, is open to speaking to the AEU. She spoke about us being the lowest paid. What I would say is that our teacher wages match what we are doing, and we did see an increase with our last enterprise bargaining agreement. The other thing that I would observe too is that we freed up time for teachers to be able to better plan and support their students in their classrooms. We also increased the wages of our hardworking education support staff, who do an amazing amount of work in our schools.

I would just like to also observe that if the good comrade, the member for Kew, wants to talk about teacher wages, last time the Liberals were in power teachers went on strike, and I remember this because I took the day off and went with Mum to that strike. There was not much school happening. The independent schoolteachers and the state schoolteachers stood together because they knew that those opposite did not care about their wages and conditions and did not want to see them get a better deal. Well, this side wants to support our teachers. We not only support our teachers through good wages and conditions, we also support people who are wanting to join the great profession that we have been a part of. That is why we have free degrees and are making sure that if you are doing a teaching degree you will not have to pay HECS.

Those opposite cut the education maintenance allowance and the free fruit program. I know a few of them over there probably have pictures of Margaret Thatcher in their offices. 'Maggie Thatcher, milk snatcher' – well, here we have the fruit snatchers on the other side. Shameful. I do apologise because my volume has gone above working volume and we need to return to working volume so that we can reflect on what this motion really means. This represents how the Labor government on this side has supported our students not just through having excellent schools and not just through opening five new schools in my electorate and upgrading two, but also through some of those other measures like our Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and school breakfast club. I would like to reflect that the maturity from some of those opposite is not what I would expect, and I would encourage them to go to some of our great schools in the Werribee electorate to see how they should really behave.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (23:27): I should have had that Red Bull I was offered because I will struggle to get through this next 10 minutes. I am pleased to contribute to this motion on the Allan Labor government's commitment to working with families. I want to start by talking about the schools

MOTIONS

1276

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

in my electorate and the incredible work that they do. Since coming to government in 2014 we have delivered unprecedented funding to the schools across the Geelong electorate – not only the infrastructure but the programs and supports that support our communities, families, students and the schools themselves.

The schools in Geelong have seen many benefits from good government policy, and that is what we have been doing from the day that we were elected – good strong government policy. That is what makes significant change for schools and for our students and their families right across Victoria. Oberon Primary School, for example, was completely redeveloped. Wangala Primary School was a whole new school. When we came to government, there had not been any new schools during the full term of the previous government. There were no new schools. Wangala Primary School, as I said, was completely rebuilt. Ashby Primary School was completely redeveloped. Manifold Heights had significant upgrades to the school. Geelong East Primary School, we are about to commence, and this is the last school of all of my schools to get a significant major redevelopment. Tate Street Primary School was upgraded, Whittington Primary School was completely rebuilt, Newcomb Primary School was redeveloped, Newtown Primary School was completely redeveloped, Chilwell Primary School had a significant upgrade, Geelong South Primary School had a complete upgrade, Fyans Park Primary School had a complete upgrade and Moolap Primary School had an upgrade. Bannockburn P-12 was a brand new school in around 2016–17. Geelong High School – we virtually rebuilt that school. Newcomb Secondary College had a complete redevelopment. Matthew Flinders girls college had a complete redevelopment. My community were just so delighted at the state-of-the-art buildings that we delivered as a Labor government. Of course it is not only the buildings, it is the people that are in them. Our teachers and the staff that are at those schools working every day with these young people deserve good infrastructure to be doing their teaching roles.

We want to build an education system that provides excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage. We have also invested in doctors in schools, and I hear from young people at some of the schools in Geelong about how significant that is for them. The health and wellbeing programs have been really welcomed by not only students but parents as well and teachers at the schools.

I do want to focus on the school breakfast program, because seeing that breakfast program in action has been absolutely fantastic. Kids come together of a morning to have food in their stomachs, no matter who they are. It makes a huge difference. There is no stigma about having that breakfast. All the kids just pile in. They have a great time enjoying each other's company and participating often in preparing the food and serving it. They feel that real pride. These are kids from all different backgrounds that are coming together and sharing that food, sharing the opportunity to serve it to each other and to do some cooking, which is really great fun for them, and most of our schools are doing that. Some schools have the students, as I said, prepare and serve the food. We know some schools have a greater number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. These programs are helping these families considerably.

We also have the school savings bonus, and that \$400 has been really significant for so many families in my electorate. I have had nothing but positive feedback from families. The burden that that has taken off those families has been incredibly significant for many. The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund has really made a difference in my community. Kids are not missing out on going on excursions or camps. They have the same opportunity as everyone else. There is nothing more heartbreaking than seeing kids missing out on these sorts of things that are being put in their schools. All of these things – the breakfast program, the school bonus, the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and the school saving bonus – are all playing a significant role in helping families meet their living costs and really providing great opportunities for these students at schools.

We have so many fantastic schools. We have a number of schools that are accepting whatever they can to support those students in their schools. One of our schools in particular has recently been able to move into their new gymnasium that was built as part of their development there. The programs they have been running in that gymnasium have been incredible for those students. There are music

programs. There are art programs. There are all sorts of things that they are able to do in there, as well as having somewhere dry and safe during bad weather, which they did not have before. This is all making a big difference for those students at our schools. The programs that are being offered in the schools, as I said, are making a real difference, particularly for young people in our secondary schools. Yes, they have the breakfast program and they have a number of other programs, but probably most of the feedback I have had from young people in particular has been around the health and wellbeing programs that we are offering in the schools and the difference that they are making for them. We know that things have been challenging for young people, particularly having experienced COVID and the impacts of that – learning from home and all those things that they had to deal with. But having that mental health and wellbeing support in schools has made a real difference for those young people. Many of them are talking very openly now about what they experienced, and they are also very appreciative of the support that they are getting at their school. It makes a difference for teachers who are working with these young people, particularly young people who have challenges, whether they are in their home life or experiences they are having outside of school. The fact that those teachers can provide that support and make sure that they are getting the support that they need is really significant for those young people.

All the things that we are doing in terms of cost-of-living support are making a difference. I know it is making a huge difference in my electorate of Geelong. I know it is making a difference right across the state for all of our schools and for all of our students. When they are lining up to get their school supplies at the beginning of the year and they have \$400 sitting there to be able to use, that makes a huge difference for those families – a really significant difference. It is really important that we continue these programs to ensure that we continue good government policy, which makes all the difference for these families.

This motion is really significant. It is outlining all the amazing things that this Labor government has done and will continue to do –

A member interjected.

Chris COUZENS: It is bougie, yes. It is fantastic. I do commend this motion to the house.

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (23:37): I move:

That debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Bills

Bail Amendment (Tough Bail) Bill 2025

Council's amendments

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (23:37): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Bail Amendment (Tough Bail) Bill 2025 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 9, page 6, line 8, omit “(Tough Bail)”.
2. Clause 9, page 6, line 12, omit “(Tough Bail)”.
3. Clause 10, line 17, omit “(Tough Bail)”.
4. Clause 10, line 26, omit “(Tough Bail)”.
5. Short title, omit “(Tough Bail)”.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (23:38): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

We said we would not leave Parliament tonight until our tougher bail laws were passed, and that is exactly what we have done. I want to thank everyone who has participated in this important debate to make sure that we are able to pass these laws – and they are the toughest bail laws in the country – and to pass them as a matter of urgency. Victorians have the right to be safe in their homes and in their neighbourhoods, and when that right is endangered there need to be consequences. That is what this bill is about: protecting Victorians, making community safety an overarching principle in every single bail decision and protecting hardworking Victorians from serious repeat offending. It is the serious repeat offending that is driving fear and harm in our communities, and that is entirely unacceptable.

I want to thank the many victims of crime that I have spoken to who have contacted me and shared their stories – families who have been terrorised and harmed and communities who have been harmed. While Victoria's bail laws are already some of the most stringent in the country, with our reverse onus test for serious offences and further amendments that were only introduced in December last year, we knew we had to go further and to do so with a real sense of urgency. The nature and scale of repeat offending has been escalating, particularly in relation to aggravated burglary and aggravated home invasion, with such serious consequences. I think it is the randomness and the lack of relationship between an alleged offender and the victims of these crimes that make them a more repeatable crime than other offences. The stories we have heard have been heartbreaking, the harm and terror and fear unimaginable. I recently met with a victim of crime. Her family had been terrorised from a recent aggravated burglary which saw a number of offenders break into her home while she and her young family were sleeping. The offenders had weapons, and they broke into their home and stole both their cars. Both of the cars were later involved in high-speed and dangerous driving. The victim turned to me and asked, 'How did this happen when these offenders were on bail?' As I have said previously, I did not have an answer for her, but I promised her we were listening, that the Allan Labor government were listening. We have listened and we have acted. We have acted swiftly and with a real and compelling sense of urgency, as is warranted and as Victorians rightly expect and deserve.

It is disappointing that those opposite have not necessarily shared that view, that sense of urgency. They have elected to draw out debate tonight and not on substantive matters – matters that make a difference to Victorians like stronger, tougher bail laws, the toughest bail laws in the country, and matters that go directly to protecting community safety. What is disappointing is that those opposite, dare I say it, are lacking in depth, lacking in substance, with no ticker, their own leader missing in action somewhere off the Far North Queensland coast. Dare I say it –

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I thought this debate was limited to the amendments made by the Council, not the bill generally.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the Attorney-General to come back to the amendments before the house.

Sonya KILKENNY: These toughest bail laws are focused squarely on community safety, protecting Victorians so that Victorians can rightly go about and live and work and feel secure in the neighbourhoods where they live, without fear. Our focus can and must also be on making sure that for young offenders we break that cycle of offending, that we help them turn their lives around. These toughest bail laws will jolt the system, making sure community safety is prioritised in every single bail decision. Victorians deserve this and nothing less, and that is what the Allan Labor government is delivering. I commend the bill.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (23:43): I was not quite clear from the Attorney-General's comments whether or not the government is actually adopting –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Ripon is warned. The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for half an hour. All members are warned.

Dylan Wight interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Tarneit, come back and apologise.

Dylan Wight: Sorry, Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Make it an hour and a half.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Michael O'BRIEN: In the contribution of the Attorney-General it was not quite clear whether or not the government is now endorsing and adopting the amendments made by the other place to this bill. If the government is now adopting the amendments made by the other place to this bill, it is no longer the tough bail bill. The government now agrees, apparently, it is not the tough bail bill. It is not tough bail. I have probably said this very rarely in my time in this place, but the Council has got it right. It is not tough bail at all because the bail bill before us does not even restore Victorian bail law to where it was 12 months ago. It is weaker than it was 12 months ago. It is weak. And that is why it is so important that we on this side support the amendments made by the other place – because this bill is not a tough bail bill, it is a weak bail bill. If the government had had the courage to actually adopt all the amendments put forward by the Liberals and Nationals in the other place, then it might have been a tough bail bill. For example, then if somebody had breached a condition of bail –

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the speaker is debating amendments that are not in front of this place at the moment. He should come back to the amendments before the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I encourage the member to continue on the amendments.

Michael O'BRIEN: It is exactly why the amendment to delete the words ‘tough bail’ from the title of the bill is so important – because this is not a tough bail bill at all. If the government had accepted the amendments put forward by the opposition in the other place, it might have been a tough bail bill; then it might have been true to its name. But because the government refused to do so, because the government refused to actually have any criminal consequences for breaching bail, because the government refused to have any toughening of the bail test for people who breach bail, because the government refused to have any toughening of the bail test for people who commit an indictable offence whilst on bail, because they refused to do that, this bill does not deserve to be called a tough bail bill. Now, we could have put forward that it be called the weak bail bill, but we thought, ‘No, we’re actually not going to play the political games of the Premier, the political games of the Attorney-General.’

A member interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: Cartoonish games, correct. I cannot remember any other bill in this place that has come in with a political slogan in its title. It shows you how desperate this government is – how absolutely desperate. Three times in the last 12 months I have come here trying to amend bail laws to make them stronger, to make them, dare I say, tougher, and this government said, ‘No, no, no.’ Three times I was denied, and then a cockerel crowed behind me. It was extraordinary. This is a government that has fought against toughening bail bills but then wants to bring into this place a bill –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I know it is late and I know you are excited to stay back, but a little order in the chamber would be good – a little less yelling.

Michael O'BRIEN: If the government wanted this to actually be a tough bail bill worthy of the name, it could have just accepted the amendments put forward by the Liberals and Nationals, and then it would have been a tough bail bill. But instead it is not. It is a weak bail bill befitting of a government

that weakens bail laws, still believes in weak bail laws – a pack of bleeding hearts who do not actually care about community safety and are only motivated by opinion polls, caucus chatter –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Eureka!

Michael O'BRIEN: and their own political careers, not the safety and security of Victorians in their own homes. So we are quite happy to accept the amendments made in the other place.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Police! Member for Eureka, this is your last warning.

Michael O'BRIEN: We accept the amendments because, let us be clear, the amendments are to delete the phrase ‘tough bail’ from the entire bill. I was concerned the Premier might be up before the ACCC for misleading and deceptive conduct. If she had tried to actually pass a bill called a tough bail bill that was not tough at all, she might have been in legal trouble. I would not want to see that happen.

What we have here is a bill which basically represents this government going 10 steps back and half a step forward. They want to think it is tough and they want to think it is strong, but it is none of those things – it is marginally better than it was before, but it is still weak. Victorians are still at risk. Victorians’ lives are still at risk and Victorians will still be at risk from people who breach bail conditions and can stay on bail because they do not face a tougher test. Victorians will still be at risk from people who can commit an indictable offence whilst on bail and not face a tougher test to get bail.

Jacinta Allan interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: That is exactly true, Premier.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Malvern. Premier, you will come to order.

Michael O'BRIEN: It is absolutely true, and that is why we support the amendments made by the Council. This is not a tough bail bill; it is a weak bail bill made by a weak government led by a weak Attorney-General and a weak Premier. But when we get a change of government in Victoria, then Victorians will get strong bail laws, a strong bail bill and real community safety. That is what Victorians deserve, and in about 18 months they will have a chance to have exactly that.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (23:51): Testing, testing; I just want to make sure this is on. I have not been up this late in many, many years. And here we are, listening to the member for Malvern become as petty as I have seen the member for Malvern be in six years. This is an incredible bill. These are the toughest bail laws in Australia, and I cannot wait to get out in the western suburbs tomorrow and talk about this tough bail bill that we are going to pass. My community do not care about the name of this bill. What they do care about is that we have a tough Premier, and she has listened to the community and her message is clear: community safety is paramount. It comes first above all else. The message to serious repeat offenders is: your time is up; the honeymoon is over. There will be serious consequences for you. My community in Melbourne’s west cannot wait for this bill to become law and then see the results that will come from it.

I have to say, and I am going to lower my voice for this one, I do want to give a shout-out to an incredible local principal. Her name is Pat, and she is going to retire at the end of this term. She has been the principal of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in Sunshine for decades. This is an incredible woman. We have been talking about teachers, and we have been talking about schools tonight – this is one of them in the western suburbs. When I went to that school three weeks ago, she told me about the terrible activities happening in her community outside that school –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Laverton needs to confine her comments to the amendments. If she wanted to talk about schools, she had her opportunity before.

The SPEAKER: Member for Laverton, I ask you to come back to the amendments before the house.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Let me tell you why this is going to be relevant to Pat. When I met with Pat, she talked about some of the most appalling crimes happening outside of her school with youth and machetes and the types of goings-on. I said to Pat, 'I promise you our Premier is cracking down on crime. There is going to be a bail bill and a reckoning in this state like no other.' These are the toughest bail laws in this country, and tonight, almost before midnight, we get the opportunity to go ahead and pass this bill and we can make it law. We can do the right thing for all Victorians. So I say to those opposite: I do not care what you call this bill; these are the toughest bail laws in the country. We have the toughest Premier here in this state and we have the opportunity to pass it tonight. I am going to leave my comments there so we can do it before midnight and go home.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (23:55): I hope following the contribution that we have just heard from the member for Laverton she can pass on to Pat that the only reason the bail laws were weakened here in this state was the Victorian Labor government changed the rules and made sure people could get out without any issues. We have seen crime rise –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I am going to remove members from the chamber if this keeps up. Leader of the Opposition, without assistance.

Brad BATTIN: We have seen crime rise, so much so that today the stats are the largest on record since they began being recorded in 1993. And the reality is that this is because repeat offenders continuously get out of jail. They fail to get remand and they get bail here in this state within 90 minutes of being arrested.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, as members of the opposition have had the opportunity to remind us tonight, it is appropriate that people only speak on the amendments that are before the house right now, and I ask that you ask the Leader of the Opposition to come back to speaking specifically to the amendments.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will speak to the amendments before the house.

Brad BATTIN: I suppose it gives us good reason why we are talking about this bill, because the reason the name 'Tough Bail' needed to be removed was because that was nothing but Labor spin, a decision not made by the department, a decision made by the minister's office to add in brackets 'Tough Bail' – nothing to do with community safety, nothing to do with keeping people locked up, nothing to do with taking machetes off the street, nothing to do with ensuring that it increases the level of what you need to do to get bail here in this state. I will tell you: on this side of the house we have an absolute passion for making sure our community is safe – not via spin, not via a title on a bill – to ensure that the government returns what we say should have been put back in the first place.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Emergency Services, you are not in your place. You can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Emergency Services withdrew from chamber.

Brad BATTIN: What we say is: what should have happened is it should not have been just this one amendment for 'Tough Bail', it should have been reversed back to what the bill was originally and the law was in relation to bail in March 2023. Prior to that date we hardly saw the amount of people going through the system they are getting now. You only have to look on social media, where young offenders are out there at the moment –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, once again the Leader of the Opposition is failing to speak directly to the amendments that are before the house at the moment. I ask you to ask him to come back to them.

The SPEAKER: I ask you to come back to the amendments before the house.

Brad BATTIN: When it comes to tough bail here in Victoria, it does not come down to a title; it comes down to action, and the actions that have been put forward with the amendments from the Shadow Attorney-General not just today but in the past as well – they have been here on three separate occasions, and Labor has voted against them on three separate occasions. It is about time we actually –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, could you please give the Leader of the Opposition some guidance here. He is now talking about amendments, apparently, that were made weeks ago. We are specifically debating the amendments that are in this house, at this place, right now.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Eureka can leave the chamber for half an hour. The Minister for Police is warned. The Premier will come to order. The Leader of the House will come to order. The member for Kororoit can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Members for Eureka and Kororoit withdrew from chamber.

Michael O'Brien: On the point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is clearly within the context of the debate. He is talking about why the name of the bill needed to be amended, which is exactly the proposition before the house. He is entirely within the realms of the debate before the house. I ask you to rule the point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will come back to the amendments before the house.

Brad BATTIN: As we have said before, on having a bill amendment with tough bail, if you wanted to have reality you should have gone out and consulted and maybe spoken to the family of Ash Gordon. You could have spoken to the family of Ash Gordon, who passed away – who was murdered – because of the fact someone was out on bail under the rules changed by the Victorian Labor government. Changing a title does not bring someone back. It never will. You now need to make sure that you cannot try and bring in the spin of having ‘tough bail’ in your bill, and that is why we supported removing ‘tough bail’, because the actual bill itself is simply just weak.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (00:01): It is important to rise on the amendments that have come from the Council. I acknowledge that it has been a significant journey to get to this point. Council members who front up each week to do this work see their Legislative Assembly colleagues hanging back a bit and probably think, ‘Well, this is just run-of-the-mill’, and we acknowledge their contributions and their debates on this.

Let us just be clear. Our Premier has put forward the toughest bail reforms in our nation. While those opposite were dropping leaks on the latitude and longitude of the Leader of the Opposition and the coordinates of the date line he was on rather than working on behalf of Victorians, we were putting through the toughest bail bill. While people were talking about whether they were going away for a cyclone that the shadow cabinet had no knowledge of or no awareness of, we were consulting with Victoria Police –

Jade Benham interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mildura, leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, it may be past midnight, but I struggle to find how the member for Mordialloc’s contribution relates to the two-word amendment made by the other place.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc to speak to the amendments before the house.

Tim RICHARDSON: The most that we have got after 7 hours from those opposite is to talk about a few words on a bill as a contribution to bail reform. The greatest victory that the Shadow Attorney-General comes forward with, with all his vigour, with all his learned friend antics, is to claim that he has changed a couple of words – because the substance of this bill will protect more Victorians and support more Victorian families.

The Premier acknowledged the work that needed to be done – not those opposite, who, in the mea culpa from the Leader of the Opposition after a number of days of being found to have misled his colleagues, got to this point. Our Premier had the leadership to meet with victims of crime to understand what Victorians need and to say, ‘We’ve got more work to do,’ and she has done that work within a week. The greatest contrast that those opposite can put forward in this moment is to say ‘We have moved a couple of words that change no element of the bill,’ and that is the greatest victory that has been put forward. Is that the greatest contribution that the member for Malvern is claiming to have made tonight – that there has been an amendment, an omission of words, put on a bill that has been debated?

Michael O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the member is debating the amendment because, if the government were serious about strengthening the bill, they would have accepted all of our amendments in the other place, which actually would have made this a tough bail bill worthy of the name.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Malvern and the Minister for Police can both leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Malvern and Minister for Police withdrew from chamber.

Tim RICHARDSON: I feel a bit cheated that the member for Malvern is making an exit, because it was one of the grandest performances I have ever seen on an amendment that omitted nine letters. That was the contribution. There is no substance in that; no substantial changes have been put forward. That is literally the problem with the modern-day Liberal Party. It is all bluff and bluster and no substance on behalf of Victorians. This amendment right here –

BrIDGET VALLENCE: On a point of order, Speaker, members need to speak to the narrow confines of the amendment. I would ask you to ask the member to return to the confines of the amendment.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc has strayed a little from the amendments. I ask him to come back to the amendments before the house.

Tim RICHARDSON: I am just astonished that after 7 hours, when it comes back to this house for our consideration, the greatest thing those opposite claim to have contributed to this bill in these amendments has been changing a few lines around the ‘tough’ definition. There is no substance in the change. That was the greatest flag capture put forward by the member for Malvern, the Shadow Attorney-General. In full vigour, in full effort, that is what is being claimed. On this side, with these amendments that have come forward, which then see the full bill roll through, we will see that Victorians are safer. They see a Premier that is leading on their behalf to create safer communities in Victoria, who fronts up and listens to their needs – not sailing away over into waters where they cannot be found, which the shadow cabinet had no idea about. She is doing the work that is required, and that is the key element to this.

DAVID SOUTHWICK: On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask if you could bring the member back to speaking on the bill.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mordialloc, I have reminded you several times now. I ask you to come back to the amendments.

Tim RICHARDSON: The Leader of the Opposition and the member for Malvern, the Shadow Attorney-General, in their contributions commented simply on the amendments that talked about whether this was tough or not. That was 7 hours of work to get this back to the chamber from the Legislative Council, and that was the claimed change or outcome. On this side, when this bill goes through with these amendments, the substance and form of this will be substantial for Victorians. It will change the outcomes and give Victoria Police the support that they need, which comes directly from listening and engaging and the care, compassion and leadership that is shown by our Premier in Victoria. It is not just whether a word changes in an amendment and 7 hours later claiming that that is your contribution on a particular bill. No, this is many, many hours of work that has been done by our Attorney-General, the Premier and the Minister for Police. This shows how we lead in Victoria. We listen to Victorians and deliver those outcomes. These amendments that will go through are part of a huge package in this bill that will make Victorians safe, and we welcome them back to the chamber.

The SPEAKER: I wish to advise the house that the Council made five amendments to this bill. Those amendments are attached to the certified copy. The amendments circulated in the house were a cumulative set of all amendments circulated in the Council. However, I confirm that the motion moved by the minister can only relate to the five amendments made. An updated schedule is being circulated now.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (00:08): When the going gets tough, the tough get going, and the word 'tough' is going straight out of this bill. Take the liquid paper out; it is going straight out of this bill. Why the word 'tough' is being taken out of this bill is because we know that they are not tough bail laws. It is very, very simple. They are not tough bail laws, and the Premier knows they are not tough bail laws, because the Premier will not get up and actually debate the amendments. If the Premier believed in the bill, she would get up and debate the amendments today. But the Premier is embarrassed, because the Premier went out and overshot the runway with this title that we have here, about a bill that is not tough. Let me say that actions speak louder than words. We know that we had the member for Malvern three times move tough bail laws, and what did this government do? They voted them down and said, 'We want nothing to do with it.' But when there was an opinion poll that said the Premier's polling had plummeted, all of a sudden they had a change of heart.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, once again we have a member of the opposition who is failing to speak directly to the amendments, and they are straying far from those, and I ask that you ask the member to come back to the amendments that are before this place right now.

The SPEAKER: Member for Caulfield, I am sure you will come back to the amendments.

David SOUTHWICK: The words absolutely matter, and what we need to understand is, how did the government come about actually calling a bill 'the tough bail bill' when the words absolutely do not reflect the bill itself? Not at all. And we know, as the member for Malvern the Shadow Attorney-General has pointed out, the amendments that we tried to bring forward, which would have made it a tougher bill and would have reflected the title, were rejected by the government. And we know the Shadow Attorney-General said that if those were actually supported by the government, then it would be legitimate to actually call it a tough bail bill. But because all of the amendments by the opposition were rejected, it is a watered-down, weaker bail bill, and you cannot call it a tough bail bill. So you have to ask yourself: why did the government call it a tough bail bill in the first place? Was it the plummeting of opinion polls of the popularity of the Premier that there was a need to change the title of the bill to a 'tough bail' bill? Is that why the Premier changed the name to a 'tough bail' bill? It is all in the title.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, once again the member on his feet is defying your ruling that he focus on the amendments. The opposition have had this bill now for 78 hours and this is the best that they can come up with?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House, I ask you to stand and apologise to the house for using a prop.

Mary-Anne Thomas: I apologise, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Member for Caulfield, I remind you to speak to the amendments.

David SOUTHWICK: I am speaking on the amendments in terms of the title of the bill – the ‘tough bail’ bill. One needs to ask: how did the government come up with the words ‘tough bail’? We have heard from the upper house that have just been through debating the amendment that was put forward to us today that it was questioned in the amendments by the opposition about how the title was formed. We know in hearing from that debate from Mr Erdogan that it was actually cooked up in the Attorney-General’s office, in the minister’s office – the ‘tough bail’ bill title. The name, to make it appear to be tough, was actually cooked up as a bit of a marketing exercise by the minister and by the Attorney herself, because we know that it absolutely is not a tough bill. It is in fact quite a weak bill, so you have to ask yourself: why was the Attorney-General cooking up a title to make something appear a lot better than it actually was? Was it the fact that the Premier’s polling was so bad that she had to come out appearing that she was going to be tough on bail? It is pretty clear that that was the case. And now all of a sudden the Premier is getting a bit nasty, because we know that the Premier knows that she was wrong. She was wrong, and the Premier has been misleading in deceptive advertising with this, because we know it ain’t tough at all, Premier. We even know that this delay in the bill itself by six months – six months people are going to be left with weaker bail laws, and even the deputy commissioner Bob Hill said today that people’s lives are going to be put at risk because this government has failed to bring in these laws immediately. Six-month delay – they have failed on bail. This is not a tough bill at all. If the government were serious, they would be bringing it in immediately, not in six months. In six months, as the deputy commissioner said, people’s lives will be at risk. But he is not the only deputy commissioner. Another deputy commissioner and a commissioner were both sacked for providing frank and fearless advice to the government, so the government knows that they have failed.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the member on his feet has spoken much longer than the Leader of the Opposition managed; however, he has done that by straying from the amendments that are before the house. I ask you to ask him to come back to the amendments.

The SPEAKER: Member for Caulfield, I have reminded you several times now to come back to the amendments.

David SOUTHWICK: I will do that, because it is very, very important that the title reflects the substance that is behind it. This title does not reflect anything, and that is why it is important to change the title. You cannot call it something that it is not, and the Premier should have known that right from the very beginning. The Premier called the bill ‘the tough bail bill’. As the Leader of the Opposition said, it ain’t the tough bail bill or, as the Premier tried to say, the toughest bail in the nation. As the Leader of the Opposition said, it is not even the toughest bail in the state. These are weak bail laws because this government have not done their homework. They have not listened to the calls from the community for tough bail and consequences. You cannot make the title something that it is not. You cannot put a tough bail bill –

Jacinta Allan interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Premier, you have misled the public on this. We have been calling for tough laws, and the Premier has not provided them. The Premier thinks that by calling it tough people are going to say, ‘Yes, we believe you.’ No-one believes you, Premier. No-one believes that you are tough on crime. No-one believes that you are going to tackle the crime crisis. Nobody believes that the Premier is going to tackle the crime crisis, that the Premier is tough on crime or that the Premier is

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

1286

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

going to deliver the toughest bail laws in the state. A title does not fix it. You need substance behind the title.

Jacinta Allan interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Premier, I know you might be a little bit angry, but –

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Caulfield, through the Chair.

David SOUTHWICK: Speaker, it is clear that the Premier does not believe in her own bill. If the Premier believed in the bill, the Premier would be up and about tonight spruiking it, talking it up and saying it is the toughest bill going. This is the challenge, Premier, to get on your feet and back your bill. The Premier has not backed her bill, because the Premier herself knows she has overcooked the title. She has overcooked the title because the substance does not reflect what the title was trying to do. It ain't a tough bill, it is a weak bail bill. It does not go far enough. The Premier has not listened to the opposition. Three times we tried to make it tough. The community has asked for tough bail. The government have not delivered tough bail. The government have not delivered tough laws. Ultimately Victorians will decide next year, Premier, and you will be ousted along with your weak titles that have come to this bill.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

Business of the house

Adjournment

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (00:19): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 1 April 2025.

Motion agreed to.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, prior to your commencement retaking the chair this evening I asked you to review the footage of the behaviour of the member for Tarneit and consult with the Deputy Speaker if you could.

The SPEAKER: I will take that on notice.

Postponement

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (00:20): I move:

That the consideration of remaining business be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Housing

David HODGETT (Croydon) (00:21): (1081) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to remove a covenant on 29 Gladesville Drive, Kilsyth, to allow a Department of Families, Fairness and Housing movable unit for accommodation for my constituent, who is homeless. My constituent is a 66-year-old female who has been homeless since 27 October

2022 after her rental home was flooded. She spent months in Emergency Recovery Victoria apartments and has moved eight times over two years. My constituent has been on the waiting list for public housing for over nine years, and with the massive wait times and demand for housing it could be many, many more years. She is on a pension and is not able to afford private rentals. She has worked with many agencies, including Uniting, Harrison and Windermere, to address her housing needs. She is in contact with Housing Victoria, who have informed her that there are movable units available. A friend has kindly offered their backyard to set up a movable unit, but its covenant only allows brick or brick veneer construction to be erected on it, which obviously the movable units are not.

In 2023 the Andrews government brought in planning reforms to allow granny flats to be built without planning approvals to help boost housing supply. This would be another way to achieve this. My constituent has been advised to engage a lawyer to have the covenant removed, but this process would cost thousands of dollars, which she does not have. It is concerning enough to hear that a 66-year-old woman is homeless, but what is more concerning is the stress and anxiety it is causing her not having a safe, stable roof over her head. My constituent deserves to have housing and a warm bed where she can concentrate on her mental health. Minister, I urge you to remove the covenant, which will allow immediate accommodation for my constituent; she cannot remain homeless. I will be happy to provide further details of my constituent confidentially to you in order for you to provide the necessary assistance in this case.

Community safety

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (00:23): (1082) My adjournment is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on the initiatives our government is taking to address Islamophobia. As the minister knows, Saturday was International Day to Combat Islamophobia, and it saddens me to say that we have seen a sharp rise in the number of Islamophobic incidents in the past couple of months.

If you want to see what this brand of hate looks like up-front, you can view it on my posts on my Facebook page, which talks about our wonderful multicultural Muslim community in Melbourne's west, with some posts celebrating Ramadan, attending iftar dinners, visiting mosques and even a post acknowledging this day was met with nasty and hate-filled comments from those types of accounts, locked accounts, of folks who more than likely do not even live in Melbourne's west or are even from Victoria, telling me about how Muslims are violent and murderous extremists and that Islamophobia is a made-up word. Can you believe that? It is racist and ignorant comments like these that justify the work our government is doing to fight Islamophobia here in Victoria, including our new anti-vilification laws and of course the funding for campaigns against Islamophobia. This funding has gone to support Muslim community organisations such as the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights and the Islamic Council of Victoria to go ahead and run support programs and provide resources aimed to help support Muslim Victorians who experience Islamophobia and discrimination.

We are a proud multicultural state here in Victoria, we come from over 300 different cultural backgrounds and we follow more than 200 different faiths. This kind of hate has no place in our community, and folks in my electorate would greatly appreciate an update on how we are working to stamp out Islamophobia in our community.

Bendigo Livestock Exchange

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (00:25): (1083) My request is to the Minister for Agriculture, and I request that the Minister for Agriculture have the department do the work necessary for the Bendigo Livestock Exchange at Huntly to be declared a sensitive receptor site under the EPA guidelines to protect it from biosecurity risk in the future. Bendigo Livestock Exchange is the major livestock selling centre in northern Victoria, with sheep and lamb sales 46 weeks of the year, as well as special sheep sales from time to time, and total livestock trades of more than 1 million head annually. To assist the logistics of transacting livestock numbers on this scale, there are holding paddocks adjacent to the selling yards in which livestock can be held for a short period. The Bendigo Livestock Exchange also

creates employment for the equivalent of 70 full-time employees, many of whom are onsite for three days a week. All this is being put at risk by Bendigo City Council's decision to allow Western Composting Technology Pty Ltd to develop a composting site within 70 metres of the selling yards at the livestock exchange – effectively the width it takes for a truck to pull in and back up to the unloading ramps. Western Composting Technology will be receiving commercial garden waste and food waste at the site.

Alarm bells should be ringing about food waste being trucked in from anywhere in the state to this site. Meat product illegally imported into Victoria could easily find its way into this site, and there lies the biosecurity risk for our national livestock sector. Estimates put the cost to the Australian economy of a foot-and-mouth outbreak at more than \$50 billion, and that is on top of the devastation and heartbreak of slaughtering millions of livestock. Those who recall the UK foot-and-mouth outbreak in 2001 will remember the TV news coverage of the huge fire piles, as slaughtered livestock were burnt to stop the spread of foot-and-mouth. Generations of livestock breeding were destroyed in one outbreak. Foot-and-mouth is endemic in many parts of the world, but not here, and Australia needs to be vigilant to keep it out. So why increase the risk by putting a composting facility which will receive food waste within 70 metres of a major livestock selling centre? No layers of protocols and rules of operation can guarantee there will not be an outbreak of a livestock disease from locating this composting facility so close to the centre. As I understand it, Western Composting Technology has already had a number of noncompliance issues at its Shepparton site, including fires in the maturation piles. The risk is too great.

Minister, on behalf of the farmers who sell through the Bendigo Livestock Exchange and the Australian livestock sector in general, please have the Bendigo Livestock Exchange declared a sensitive receptor site and protect the industry from the risk of a major disease outbreak, from locating this composting facility within 70 metres of the selling centre.

Melton electorate fuel prices

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (00:28): (1084) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action I seek is for the minister to seriously consider the findings of a parliamentary intern report which undertook a thorough investigation into the factors contributing to the excessively high fuel prices in Melton as part of the design of the Allan Labor government's fair fuel plan. My constituents in Melton are consistently paying significantly more for fuel than those in neighbouring suburbs, despite similar market conditions. On multiple occasions I have raised concerns in this Parliament about the ongoing burden these inflated fuel prices place on Melton residents. The issue remains unresolved, and the discrepancies in pricing continue to unfairly disadvantage our community.

In response to these concerns, I commissioned the parliamentary intern to undertake a detailed analysis of fuel prices in Melton. The findings of this report provide clear evidence of non-competitive pricing behaviour in the area – price gouging. Despite the presence of 12 petrol stations, the lack of independent operators appears to have resulted in uniform pricing that is noticeably higher than in similar western suburbs, and by contrast, other regions with comparable characteristics experience greater competition and more reasonable pricing. This report reinforces what my constituents already know, which is that they are being forced to pay higher prices without a legitimate economic justification. The disparity is particularly concerning given the demographic profile of Melton, which includes many working families who rely heavily on their vehicles for daily travel. The additional financial strain caused by high fuel costs has a direct impact on household budgets, exacerbating cost-of-living pressures.

In addition, I have corresponded with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission regarding this matter. In my letters to the ACCC I outlined the clear and sustained price differences between Melton and nearby areas such as Bacchus Marsh and Taylors Hill, where prices can be as much as 44 cents per litre cheaper than what they are in Melton. These figures suggest the need for urgent intervention to ensure fair competition and consumer protection.

I urge the minister to take seriously the findings of the report and to help address these ongoing issues. Residents of Melton deserve the same fair and competitive fuel prices as those in surrounding suburbs. By prioritising an investigation into the factors behind these price discrepancies, the government can provide much-needed relief to our community. I look forward to the minister's response.

Auburn Primary School

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (00:30): (1085) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I ask the minister to undertake is to engage with his department to deliver urgently required upgrades to bathroom facilities at Auburn Primary School. The minister will recall that I have previously corresponded with him and his office regarding Auburn Primary School's ongoing need to undertake substantial upgrades to their junior bathrooms. As the minister will recall from my letter of 4 June last year, the driving need behind these works is to provide a fit-for-purpose disabled bathroom to accommodate current students and parents with mobility issues in the Auburn Primary School community.

I was glad to receive a reply from the minister on 1 July last year. The minister committed to have his department engage with Auburn Primary School about the possibility of utilising an accessible building program grant. I regret to inform the house that, to my understanding, these conversations were substantially unproductive and have not led to the desired result. Auburn Primary School has subsequently and unsuccessfully applied again for capital works funding to undertake these necessary upgrades. Auburn Primary School have also informed me that they would appreciate any constructive feedback on their previous grant applications so that they can understand better why they have thus far been so unsuccessful. Finally, I would also like to invite the minister, as part of this process, to visit Auburn Primary School with me to see the state of the bathrooms for himself and meet with school leadership, parents and volunteers. I am confident the minister will agree that student bathroom accessibility and the quality of facilities is a matter that transcends politics and should be addressed with the collective support of everyone here today.

It should not be this hard for schools such as Auburn Primary School to secure basic facilities for students. We know that learning outcomes are hindered when facilities are not fit for purpose and up to the highest levels that we ought to be able to expect in Victoria. Auburn Primary School has often, and too often, missed out on basic funding requirements. I urge the minister to take this request seriously and to act on it.

Music education

Katie HALL (Footscray) (00:33): (1086) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in hosting a round table with the music education sector. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Creative Industries, equity of access to arts and culture is at the forefront of my work, with music education being of paramount importance. Music, and the ability to create it, is fundamental to the human experience and should be available to everyone, especially children. Within the sector the benefits are well understood. Music, both classroom and instrumental, is one of the most enriching activities available for primary school aged children. The neurological benefits cannot be understated. There is a wealth of evidence in Australian and overseas contexts that shows music education improves learning outcomes across the board, particularly within STEM subjects. Children who have access to music education have higher attendance rates, greater engagement and improved behavioural outcomes. The sector has known this for a long time, and I am excited to continue the work, alongside the Minister for Education, to help realise these amazing benefits for all Victorian public school children.

Education funding

Tim READ (Brunswick) (00:34): (1087) Happy Friday, everyone. My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the government provide more maintenance funding for old public school buildings. Melbourne's inner city is fortunate to have a number of public

ADJOURNMENT

1290

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

schools located in beautiful old buildings. There are several in my electorate with histories stretching back more than 100 years. My own children went to one of these schools, so I can personally attest that as much as our family and our community value and appreciate these buildings we know they need extra attention and maintenance to keep them in good shape. I have visited local public schools many times since I was elected, and while every building is different, you start to hear about many of the same problems: leaking roofs, rotting window frames, peeling paint and cracks in the walls. Much of this needs expensive scaffolding to reach. Sometimes entire rooms are closed off to students and staff out of concern for their safety, and this is usually the point at which the state government steps in to fix the problem. But the government needs to properly fund preventative maintenance before more expensive building work is required. We want these buildings to be maintained so that our students have a safe and welcoming learning environment and our teachers feel valued.

I have appealed to the state Labor government many times on behalf of these schools, with mixed success, asking the Treasurer for more money in the annual budget, asking questions in Parliament and writing to the education minister about individual schools, but many of these problems persist, and they get more expensive and difficult to fix as time passes. In the meantime I have heard of at least one case in which parents were pooling their own money to fund necessary repairs. That should never happen at a public school, where the state has an obligation to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment. I quote from the Department of Education's webpage on heritage buildings:

Under the Heritage Act 2017 ... principals, as asset managers, must not allow Victorian Heritage Register listed buildings to fall into disrepair or fail to maintain those buildings to the extent that their conservation is threatened.

At first glance this seems fair enough, but I do not know how many public school principals can keep up their end of this bargain if the state government does not give them enough money. Maintenance funding is often only enough to paint a couple of classrooms each year. The state cannot argue that we have not had the money when we look at the spending on the grand prix, horserace funding, massive road projects and the massive new prison that has been sitting empty for two years. Surely here in the Education State our students are more important.

Renewable energy

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (00:37): (1088) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister D'Ambrosio. The Victorian government's neighbourhood batteries program is helping communities around the state slash their bills and beat the cost of living. These batteries soak up cheap renewable energy from rooftop solar during the day and feed it back into homes or organisations at night, when it is most needed. They help communities slash thousands of dollars off their power bills, making the power grid more resilient and enabling more solar energy in our state. I am delighted that the minister has announced round 2 of the program, with 65 batteries in 43 communities around Victoria.

Mary-Anne Thomas: There'll be one in Trentham.

Nina TAYLOR: There you go – and one in my electorate. The Salvation Army are being funded to install 22 batteries at food banks, crisis accommodation and community centres. They estimate that the batteries will return \$790,000 of energy bill savings, income that they can invest into frontline services for those most in need. I ask the minister: will you join me in my electorate to meet the people who install and benefit from these neighbourhood batteries? It is one more way that Victoria is slashing power bills for working families and leading the way with our commitment to cheap, renewable energy.

Timber industry

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (00:38): (1089) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide for the businesses that the government said it would – the supports for the end of the timber industry. On 23 August 2023 agriculture minister

Gayle Tierney put out a media release stating the Andrews Labor government had announced the expansion of timber worker supports. It said it would support businesses that were impacted but not licensed to VicForests, and the media release cited firewood sellers, guitar makers and seed collectors as examples. But 18 months later firewood sellers Tim and Andrea Knight, the very type of business that it was stated would be supported, are not. They are now told the forestry transition support packages for businesses are being directed to those that had a contractual relationship with VicForests or businesses that offered specialised services to either VicForests or sawmills. This was not in the original statement from Minister Tierney. Minister Tierney said businesses that were not licensed to VicForests would be supported.

The Knights have also been told by the department that they have been classified as retailers and as retailers they may choose to source their product from elsewhere or sell alternate products. This raises three points. Firstly, they were purchasing directly from VicForests, so how are they not eligible? Secondly, they may be technically able to purchase from other suppliers, but they simply cannot purchase firewood at an affordable level anywhere in Victoria with the timber industry having closed. Thirdly, regardless of the above, there is no mention of retailers being excluded in the original announcement or media release.

I also have a trucking company, Pelz Haulage, that had a large part of its business servicing the mills – no compensation for them either. The correspondence to the Knights says businesses that offered specialised services to sawmills like Pelz Haulage would be covered. Which one is it? You cannot have it both ways. All this time bureaucrats are coming up with ridiculous criteria and excuses to not support these businesses. We have timber transition money going to – and I quote a recent media release – ‘upskill community members to help identify future economic opportunities’ and ‘initiatives identified by local innovation working groups through the local development strategies’. Spare me. This is wasted money. It should be going to those businesses that were impacted, as the minister said that she would do in 2023.

School saving bonus

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (00:41): (1090) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is an update on how the Cranbourne community is benefiting from the school saving bonus. I am absolutely delighted to say what a big difference it is making to the community, but I did want to take the opportunity to thank our business managers and our administrative staff who have worked so hard to make sure that families get access to this incredibly important cost-of-living measure. I look forward to the minister’s response.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (00:42): The member for Croydon raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and the action that he seeks is that the minister remove a covenant that is stopping one of his constituents from accessing the accommodation that she so desperately needs. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place, and the action that the member seeks is that the minister provide her with an important update on the work that she and our government are doing to address the very serious and significant issue of Islamophobia in our state.

The member for Murray Plains raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Agriculture, and the action that he seeks is that the minister seek to declare the Bendigo Livestock Exchange as a sensitive receptor site. The member for Melton raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action that he seeks is that the minister consider the work and findings of his parliamentary intern and the work that they did in the design of the Allan Labor government’s fuel finder app. The member for Hawthorn raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. The action that he seeks is that the minister upgrade the bathroom facilities at Auburn Primary School.

ADJOURNMENT

1292

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 20 March 2025

The member for Footscray raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action that she seeks is that the minister host a round table with the music education sector.

The member for Brunswick raised a matter also for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action he seeks is that the minister provide more maintenance funding for older and historic school buildings in the electorate of Brunswick. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action that the member seeks is that the minister join her and the installers and those that will benefit from the neighbourhood batteries which will be installed in the member's electorate. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Agriculture. The action that he seeks is that the minister provide for the businesses who, whilst they are not licensed to VicForests, are still impacted by the forest transition that is taking place. The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and she is seeking an update on how the school saving bonus is working to assist the families in her electorate.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, members. Can I give a big shout-out to the clerks and the attendants and our catering teams for their support this evening. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 12:45 am (Friday).