Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 17 June 2025

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

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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

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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)

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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
Benham, 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'Keeffe, 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

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Tuesday 17 June 2025

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Matt Fregon) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Condolences

Esmond Julian Curnow

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (12:04): I advise the house of the death of Esmond Julian Curnow, member of the Legislative Assembly for the district of Kara Kara from 1970 to 1976. I ask members to rise in their places as a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased.

Members stood in their places.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will convey a message of sympathy from the house to the relatives of the late Esmond Curnow.

Hon Dr Race Mathews

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:05): I move:

> That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Dr Race Mathews and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament, the labour movement and the people of Victoria as member of the Legislative Assembly for the district of Oakleigh from 1979 to 1992, Minister for Community Services from 1987 to 1988, Minister for Police and Emergency Services from 1982 to 1987 and Minister for the Arts from 1982 to 1987.

Race Mathews believed in the power of government to make a difference, and he dedicated his life to proving that it could. He served the Victorian community across all three levels of government – local, state and federal – and in every role he brought with him that deep belief in fairness, a sharp and searching mind and a steady, lifelong commitment to public service. Race Mathews grew up in Melbourne in a working-class family, part of a long line of dedicated Labor supporters. However, it was reading some left-wing books in the library of Melbourne Grammar School that sparked Race's political calling, and the irony of course was not lost on Race. In one of the country's most elite educational institutions he found the radical ideas that would inspire his lifelong commitment to social justice. In 1956 he cemented that commitment by joining the great Australian Labor Party and jumping in with both feet as an organiser on a number of local, state and federal campaigns.

In 1963 he put his own hand up, getting himself elected as a local councillor for the people of Croydon. Then between 1967 and 1972 Race had that great opportunity of serving as principal private secretary to Gough Whitlam, an honour he would later describe as one of the greatest privileges of his life. There Race helped sow the early architecture of Medibank, what we now know today as Medicare. The system that Race helped create would become the bedrock of health care in our nation, a system that ensures that every Australian can see a doctor no matter where they live or their bank balance, a tremendous Labor government legacy.

Following that watershed federal election of 1972 Race was elected as the federal member for Casey, one of just two Labor members in the history of the seat of Casey. Then in 1979 Race was elected to the Victorian Parliament and to this place as the member for Oakleigh. In this Parliament Race served for over a decade, holding senior portfolios in the ministries of police and emergency services, community services and the arts.

As the member for Oakleigh Race would often freely hand out his card with his private home phone number on it to constituents. Locals would then of course call him directly, day or night, and he or perhaps his wife Iola would answer that phone at all hours, because to him that is what representation meant – not just holding the office but being available, being there for people, and we saw that as he served in that role of Minister for Community Services. He strengthened child protection and helped

lead the closure of institutions housing people with intellectual disabilities. This shift to community-based care was one of the great social reforms of that time, and its impact echoes across to today in the lives, the dignity and the freedoms of thousands of Victorians living with an intellectual disability.

As Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Race modernised the force, helped shape the state's emergency response after those devastating Ash Wednesday fires and also introduced tighter gun controls. Then as Minister for the Arts Race opened the Arts Centre at Southbank and helped to also establish the Melbourne Writers Festival. Notable too is it may well be the first and only time in Victoria's history that those portfolios that he held at the same time, of police and the arts, would collide so directly, in the infamous story from 1986 when Picasso's *Weeping Woman* was stolen from the National Gallery of Victoria by a group called the Australian Cultural Terrorists, demanding more money for youth arts. As the minister that was responsible for both law enforcement and the arts, Race found himself facing a rather unique crisis. But thankfully, as all of those who are aware of this chapter of our state's history will know, the painting was eventually returned unharmed, a little unceremoniously left in a locker at Spencer Street station.

The real measure of Race Mathews's legacy was found far from the headlines. He remained a deep thinker throughout his life. That same scholar who as a schoolboy pored over his ideas amongst the quiet shelves of the Melbourne Grammar library wrote books. He wrote policy. He remained a committed Fabian for more than 40 years and a fierce believer in the ideal that a more equal society was not just possible but absolutely necessary. Race Mathews was thoughtful and principled. He was deeply respected and widely admired across our great Australian Labor Party, and he also helped shape some of the most important reforms in this country's social history.

In the final days of Race's life, as his health declined, Race managed to make it to a pre-poll centre and cast his final vote for Labor. He knew the party that he had given so much of his life to was ahead in the polls, and on election night Iola said it felt as if he was right there watching on. Just two days later Race passed away surrounded by those who loved him and with the quiet comfort of knowing that the ideals he had spent a lifetime fighting for were being carried forward.

Race Mathews helped to build a fairer, better Victoria and a more decent Australia. On behalf of the government and the people of Victoria I extend our heartfelt condolences to Race's wife of 52 years Iola. And Iola, I thank you for your partnership with Race in supporting him and therefore for the support you gave to our community as well. To Race's children Sean, Jane, Vanessa, Keir and Talya, to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and to his friends and comrades and all who were touched by Race's work and his example, vale, Race Mathews.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (12:12): I rise today on behalf of the opposition to pay tribute to the life of the Honourable Charles Mathews, known simply as Race, as we have heard, and offer our deepest condolences to his family and friends. Public life is a demanding call. It is a life of conviction, of service and often of great personal sacrifice. It is a life that Race Mathews lived to the fullest, leaving an indelible mark on the political and cultural landscape of not only this state but our nation. I also extend deepest sympathies from this side of the house to his beloved wife Iola, to his children Sean, Jane, Vanessa, Keir and Talya and to his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Race Mathews was one of many of us in this place, a political opponent, but he was never simply that. He was a man of intellect, conviction and integrity. He was in the truest and most honourable sense of the word a servant of the people, not guided by personal ambition but by a deep, unshakeable belief in the power of public policy to change lives for the better. His career was one of remarkable breadth, spanning local, state and federal government. He began just prior to the current member for Croydon in the former Croydon Shire Council, entered the federal Parliament as the member for Casey and later served for 13 years in the Legislative Assembly as the member for Oakleigh.

It is worth pausing on his time as a federal member for Casey. In his maiden speech to the Commonwealth Parliament in the 1970s, he described Casey as being on the doorstep of Victoria's Dandenong Ranges, encompassing communities like Ringwood, Warrandyte and the outer suburban centres. That description is as true today as it was then, a blend of bushland, beauty and suburban aspiration. While the electorate of Casey is not directly adjacent to my own, I too have the privilege of serving communities of Melbourne's outer edge, and like Race Mathews, I see every day the challenges and hopes of the families in these growing suburbs in the need for infrastructure, jobs, good schools and safe streets. We may have sat on opposite sides of politics, but we have both known the importance of listening to our communities and advocating for them relentlessly and without reserve. Like me, Race Mathews believed that politics starts with people, that policy is not abstract but personal, and that good government is about being present, being responsive and being accountable.

Before he was elected, Race was a teacher and speech therapist, roles that gave him insight into the daily struggles and quiet triumphs of ordinary Victorians. It was this grounding that shaped his political world view and which led him to serve as the principal private secretary to Gough Whitlam. In that role, Race helped shape some of the most consequential reforms in Australian history, and none more significant than Medibank, the forerunner of Medicare.

He was elected to federal Parliament in 1972, at a time of national transformation. The clippings from that era speak of a man with a young family, a mobile electorate office in a converted van and a boundless commitment to public service. But it was here in this chamber where Race left his most enduring mark when he delivered his maiden speech in the Victorian Parliament in June 1979. He did so with a disarming wit and self-awareness. He said:

> The Leader of the House has been quoted as saying that maiden speeches should be non-controversial and limited to a quarter of an hour … Luckily, my maiden speech was made in another place some time ago. A lot of things can be done by a majority vote in the democratic process, but restoring lost innocence is not one of them.

It was pure Race: astute, ironic and always attuned to the bigger picture.

As a minister in the Cain government, he held two seemingly disparate portfolios: police and emergency services, and the arts. It earned him an affectionate nickname at the time, which I will not say here today – they were different times then – but it was a title that he accepted with good humour, which he believed showed the seriousness with which he actually approached both roles.

In the arts, his impact was transformative. He opened the Melbourne Arts Centre on Southbank, established the Spoleto Festival Melbourne, now the Melbourne International Arts Festival, and helped launch the Melbourne Writers Festival. These are cultural institutions that continue to shape Melbourne's identity today. And of course it was during his tenure that Picasso's *The Weeping Woman* was stolen from the NGV – one of the more colourful chapters in our state's history. Race's steady handling of that saga, despite being mocked in ransom notes as a 'tiresome old bag of swamp gas', showed his resilience and poise under pressure.

In his police and emergency services portfolio, his leadership came to the fore in the wake of the Ash Wednesday bushfires in 1983, one of the most devastating disasters in our state's history. He helped lead Victoria's recovery, strengthened our emergency response system and pushed for the modernisation of the Victorian police force and tighter firearm laws. These are not small achievements. They are enduring legacies. As someone who understands the responsibilities that come with public safety, I feel a particular affinity to Race Mathews's service as minister for police and emergency services. Like Race, I work closely with the communities of outer suburban Melbourne, which expect their representatives to take their public safety seriously. His tenure came at a time of great challenge, particularly in the wake of the Ash Wednesday bushfires, and he rose to meet that challenge with calm leadership and clear resolve. He led reforms to modernise Victoria Police, tightened gun laws at a time when this was no small task and improved our state's disaster readiness in ways that saved lives. It is no exaggeration to say that his reform laid the foundation for much of

the capability of the emergency services that we rely on today. He understood that the first duty of government was to keep its citizens safe. That was his mission then, and it remains ours now.

But Race Mathews was more than a minister. He was, above all, a man of ideas. His association with Fabianism reflects his long-term interest in policy, cooperative economics and reforming capitalism through inclusive stakeholder-based models. His work with the Fabian Society and his books like *Jobs of Our Own* underline that commitment.

Importantly, he was also a family man. The stories of his life, of losing his first wife Jill at a young age, of raising his children with strength and tenderness and of 52 years marriage to Iola are reminders of the personal cost and quiet heroism that accompanied public service. In his final years, as he battled Alzheimer's, Race's voice may have dimmed, but his influence did not, and his legacy remains etched in this state, its institutions, its policies and its people.

His wife quoted in her eulogy of him from *Terminator 2*, of all places – probably words that we would not have come up with:

> The future is not set. There is no fate but what we make for ourselves.

Race Mathews made his own fate, and in doing so he helped shape a more caring, creative and compassionate Victoria. On behalf of the opposition and on behalf of all Victorians who value integrity in public life, we offer our profound thanks and deepest condolences to his family. May he rest in peace.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (12:20): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on this condolence motion. We extend our condolences to his wife of 52 years Iola. Race, when he married Iola, said to the *Age* newspaper he had:

> … deprived 'The Age' of the best education correspondent it ever had.

If you read Iola's biography of her late husband and if you read her contribution in the *Age* more recently, you can see what a wonderful person she is. We are joined here today by Iola, Sean and Talya; we thank you very much.

Race believed in the possibilities of progressive politics. His legacy is deeply entwined with that of Gough Whitlam. You can only imagine what it must have been like to be at Gough Whitlam's side during those big reforms. On 28 February he gave his inaugural speech to the Commonwealth Parliament, and he said:

> A nation is as sound as its education system.
>
> …
>
> The most conspicuous characterstic of Australian education is the unfair way in which it is distributed.

As the Premier said, he will always be remembered for his landmark reforms around Medicare and education, and in my contribution I just want to touch on his contribution to education. Gough Whitlam said in his biography the most intense political debate in Australia in the 1960s was not about Vietnam, it was about education. He said:

> No country with our resources should tolerate the present standard of our schools; no socialist party should tolerate the present inequality of opportunity for our children.

When Gough Whitlam came together with Race Mathews, they were an incredible force that changed the future of so many children across our wonderful country.

In 1969 Malcolm Fraser was the education minister, and of course there was the policy that non-government schools should only receive funding from the Commonwealth. Race Mathews and Gough Whitlam took this to the 1969 ALP national conference, and they had a lot of fierce opposition as well. But they were very concerned that they needed to change the way schools were funded. Their view was that both private and non-government schools and all government schools should be funded and

that there were disadvantaged areas and postcodes right across our nation. They made sure that every child, no matter their background, got that great transition to a wonderful education.

Race, with Gough, in May 1973 set up *Schools in Australia*, which for the very first time introduced a needs-based funding system to a common resource standard – and the shadow minister will know that language as well. We talk about Gonski now, but if you go back 50 years, it was Race Mathews and Gough Whitlam that did the original Gonski with the Karmel report, four decades earlier than David Gonski. Race Mathews and Gough Whitlam were ahead of their time and very forward thinking.

Why was it education for Race? Because he studied at Toorak Teachers' College, where he met his first wife Geraldine, who was also undertaking teaching. He could have studied and gone and worked anywhere, but he went to Yinnar South Primary School near Morwell, one of the most disadvantaged communities in our state. He spent his weekends travelling to Moe to regularly meet his new fiancée Jill, where she was also teaching. He said the reason he joined the Labor Party in 1956 in Moe was because of what he experienced at Yinnar primary school. Indeed he told the *Herald*'s Doug Aiton the story of a Morwell family he had known when he was working in Latrobe Valley. He was only 19 and was a teacher, but one of the children in his class had a major speech impediment. Race could not believe that he could not get treatment for this young boy. He said:

> That's why I joined the ALP. I couldn't *get* help. I thought someone should help them.

The reason we are here today is for a better life for ordinary people. It is said often that you should not meet your heroes, but there is no doubt that when Race met Gough Whitlam he summed up everything he wanted to be as a human person. He said:

> The chance to work with someone like Whitlam crops up once in a hundred years.

And it is:

> … a privilege that perhaps a handful of people get once in a century.

He said:

> It was akin to living right next to a power house, the constant throb of the energy, the scintillating creativity of the mind.

Working for Gough was endlessly stimulating. He lived at full stretch and everyone expected you to catch up with him. He said:

> To become Prime Minister myself would not be half as rewarding as that was.

Race did not become Prime Minister, but he did get elected to the federal Parliament, representing the division of Casey. But he also then transitioned successfully to state Parliament. He said, after the dismissal of the Whitlam government, that federal politics never seemed real to him. As the member for Oakleigh, as has been said, he represented the portfolios of police and emergency services and the arts. As the Premier highlighted and as the opposition highlighted too, there was that infamous stealing of the painting. What many people will not realise is that when Race was Minister for the Arts, the government paid $1.6 million for *Weeping Woman*. That today is valued at more than $150 million – not bad for a member of the socialist left. We should always be very careful of how we treat money. It might not have been insured at the time, but he was the police minister and ensured it was safely returned.

He grew up in a home where the arts were valued. He wanted to make the arts more easily and widely acceptable. It would be remiss not to mention what he did as the minister, following, in the arts, the great work of Evan Walker. Many people will be appreciative of the great work that Evan Walker did in creating the arts precinct down at Southbank. It says a lot about the character of Race that when he was the minister with John Cain, they actually requested the former Premier Rupert Hamer come and open the Arts Centre, because they knew about the bipartisan nature of politics, and they also knew

what they needed to do to make sure that centre could be a success for both sides of politics going forward. Today, whether it be the Playbox at the Malthouse, the Melbourne Theatre Company or the Victorian State Opera, these all have Race's DNA running right through them.

There was that scandal, and Picasso's *Weeping Woman* was safely returned. Can I say, though, there was a reshuffle as well, and he became the Minister for Community Services. Many people said this was a demotion for Race Mathews, but he said no, this was not a demotion. This is what every Labor Party man wants: he wants to make sure people are more conscious of their consciences than their hip pockets. He said:

> The areas I will be dealing with are the pivot of our social justice strategy.

As private secretary to Gough, he considered this finishing where he started in social policy, and there he oversaw the deinstitutionalisation of the intellectually disabled and the wholesale strengthening of the child protection act. What a legacy to be proud of.

I send my heartfelt condolences to his wife of 52 years Iola; his children Sean, Jane, Vanessa, Keir and Talya; his eight grandchildren as well – I will put it on *Hansard* – Hagan, Georgia, Nyx, Seth, Rebecca, Felix, Caleb, Arnau; and his four great grandchildren Cedar, Ember, Hazel and Cora. Victoria is a better place for Race's service, and the labour movement is stronger for his belief.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:27): I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Nationals to pay our condolences to the family and friends of Race Mathews and to the wider labour movement and to acknowledge his period of service. I am indebted to the Minister for Education, because in my biographical information I was not aware that Race had spent time at Yinnar South Primary School. Whilst it would be completely wrong of me to rely on Race's memory, I have just recently written to the minister about an issue at Yinnar South Primary School. I will not seek to do the wrong thing and suggest that this would help, but perhaps when the minister is responding on the infrastructure needs of Yinnar South Primary School he might recall that Race Mathews did time there. It is a recognition, though, of the commitment that Race obviously had.

Growing up, I remember the *Weeping Woman* saga, but I also remember, as a kid, the name Race Mathews, partly because of the name and partly because my own father was as passionate about politics as Race Mathews was, but in a very, very different way – in fact the exact opposite. I remember Dad railing against the Fabian Society and many others. But I do remember Race Mathews and that name at the time. He obviously served as the member for Casey in the federal Parliament from 1972 to 1975, having had the time prior to that working for Gough Whitlam, and as the Minister for Education indicated, that would have been a time. As Iola said – and I am going to be quoting a little bit from her obituary on her husband – she quoted him as saying that it was 'the most tumultuous, and by far the most rewarding' time of his career. I can imagine that would have been the case as he moved on from time as a teacher and as a speech therapist into the heady world of federal politics at that time. Obviously he came back to Victoria and to the Victorian Parliament, serving as the member for Oakleigh from 1979 to 1992.

His inaugural speeches, having had a brief look at them, reflect an eloquence and a conviction that really sets him apart. You can read the passion for his commitment to social justice in those speeches. I also noticed a couple of things, including how much times have changed since his contribution. In 1979 he lamented the introduction of the word processor and how it was costing 20,000 jobs for typists, girls in their first year out of school, which is not something that we would say now – that girls are just looking for that. I also noted how much things have changed but how much they have stayed the same, because in his inaugural speech, which was then called a maiden speech, in 1973 in the federal Parliament he talked about patients waiting at Box Hill Hospital. He talked about the roads. I note the contribution in respect of the typists was about the threat of technology, and we are still facing those issues today with AI and the threat to jobs. It is interesting how much things change and how much they stay the same.

I think others have made comments about Race's career in the ministry and some of those challenges. *Weeping Woman* was high profile but probably not the most important thing. Imagine having to deal with the aftermath of Ash Wednesday as the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. That would have been a difficult time for anyone in government and indeed the Parliament at the time.

I mentioned his commitment, and I think there was a commitment to the labour movement and to the socialist cause. I think the book titles alone tell us who Race Mathews was. The book titles were *Australia's First Fabians: Middle-Class Radicals, Labour Activists and the Early Labour Movement* in 1993; *Jobs of Our Own: Building a Stakeholder Society* in 1999; and *Of Labour and Liberty: Distributism in Victoria, 1891–1966*. They tell a story of his commitment, and I am sure the member for Essendon has read all of those and will be giving us quotes from them at some stage.

As Iola said in her obituary in the *Age*:

> … he was driven by a passion for fairness and justice, and a commitment to equality, democracy and empowerment.

I extend on behalf of the Nationals our condolences to Iola; their five children Sean, Jane, Vanessa, Keir and Talya; and the memory of a leader as well to his eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Vale, Race Mathews.

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:32): Very few individuals within the labour and progressive movements have reached the level of influence that Race Mathews had in shaping our nation. He was a true giant of our movement, an unwavering Labor man in every sense of the word, and he will be deeply missed. During his long tenure as secretary and president of the Australian Fabian Society from 1960 to 2006, Race championed bold and visionary policies. He consistently pushed Labor governments to think big about the transformational change only Labor can deliver and worked to make sure those ideas were acted on.

As principal private secretary to then opposition leader Gough Whitlam, Race played a key role in shaping policy on education and health, as has been mentioned. He worked on the foundations of what would become Medibank, the forerunner to Medicare, which others in the chamber, including the Premier, have mentioned, a game changer which now sits imprinted on the soul of our nation and a legacy that will transcend generations.

Race continued his service to the country as the federal member for Casey during the second Whitlam government and would later serve as a state member for Oakleigh. As the member for Oakleigh, he would go on to serve in the Cain government in multiple ministries – as Minister for the Arts, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Community Services. I was a bit concerned when the Premier told the story about him giving out his phone number; it is a standard that I do not think any others will keep beyond Race's tenure.

In that time, though, he oversaw the enrichment of the arts, with the opening of the Arts Centre in Southbank and the establishment of the Melbourne Writers Festival and the Melbourne festival of the arts, things that we take for granted today. He faced up to keeping our community safe by overseeing comprehensive reforms to Victoria Police and being there for Victorians when they needed it most during the Ash Wednesday bushfires in 1983. He was a jack-of-all-trades and a master of them all as well.

Race was also remembered by his colleagues as the most well-read man in Parliament, and as the saying goes, 'Knowledge is power.' In today's world, where facts are scarce and misinformation is rife, knowledge has never been more important, and the world would be a better place with more people like Race, who could dismantle arguments with well-researched facts and dry wit, not with bluster and theatrical displays. He did the groundwork, even if it was not in the limelight, where everybody else wanted to be. He did the groundwork.

The Minister for Consumer Affairs tells the story that one night in the later years, when Race was involved with party reform in the Labor Party, he attended a Moorabbin branch meeting. He quipped that he liked branch meetings and in fact went further and said he was a connoisseur of branch meetings. No-one ever said that other than Race, I am sure, but that shows how grounded and how decent and what a collectivist he was.

To represent the community of Oakleigh is an incredible privilege, one that comes with the weight of following in the footsteps of giants like Race Mathews – and he was a giant. I am reminded of this every time I sit in this chamber in this chair. It is a sentiment I believe every member of Parliament shares: the responsibility to uphold the work of those who came before us in representing our communities. That is no small task, but I draw strength and inspiration from Race's example and his enduring commitment to public service.

As we reflect on his legacy, my thoughts are with his beloved wife of 52 years Iola Mathews; his five children Keir, Talya, Jane, Vanessa and Sean; and the extended Mathews family and clan. I know they will be feeling this immense loss most deeply, and I extend to them my best wishes and thoughts at this time. My thoughts are also, though, with those in the labour movement and the Australian Fabian Society, who loved him as well and will miss him. Vale, Race Mathews.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:36): I think all of us in this place would agree that in our respective parties there are two types of people: there are those who are passing through the party, and there are those who are of the party, and Race was definitely the latter. I had the great privilege of first meeting Race in about 1995. By that stage we had lost government at federal and state level, and they were lean years; they were tough years. I would go and see Race because at that stage he was working for the Graduate School of Government at Monash University. His offices were at the top end of Collins Street. I will always remember those times. He was always so inquisitive, and he was always so generous with his time.

I know he was a member of this place, but his most profound influence, I think it will be showed, was when he was the principal private secretary to Gough Whitlam for those years between 1967 and 1972. Gough had a really simple mantra at that stage: it was about the party, the policy and the people. We can talk at length about party reform and the appalling behaviour of the central executive and their inability to deliver a win at the 1969 federal election because of the appalling state of the Victorian branch of the party, which became a great backdrop for the generation-defining play *Don's Party*, but I do want my contribution today to be an uplifting reflection as opposed to an unrelenting rant. But I could say that one of the great tragedies is that a win in 1969 would have provided a new government that had not been in power for 20 years and three years of an expanding economy as opposed to dealing with the fallout of the OPEC oil crisis as well as stagflation within moments of arrival.

I think in many respects the apogee of Race's great contribution to Gough's work was the policy speech that Gough delivered on 13 November 1972 at the Blacktown Civic Centre. If you do get the chance, the Whitlam Institute has a copy of that speech available. It is just so striking, the way in which that speech redefined modern Australia and how in many cases it was almost like a calling for the fact that the war continues and that the fight will always be there to advance these issues. But I think it comes down to the work of the program, and the program was *Labor's Way: A Summary of Information on the Policy of the Australian Labor Party*, June 1972**,** which was a 55-page election manifesto. What is extraordinary about this work was the fact that this policy was developed from opposition. I will give a case in point. Gough had a meeting with John Deeble and Dick Scotton in July 1967. Deeble was an interesting guy. He did a bachelor of commerce at Melbourne University. While he was studying part time, he was working as a manager at Peter Mac. He was convinced to join the Melbourne Institute to do health economics, and Dick Scotton joined him. They published an analysis in the *Australian Economic Review*, which talked about the fact that:

> … most of the 20 per cent of the population who were uninsured –

in the existing health system –

> … were relatively young and healthy …
>
> Excluding them from the risk pool raised the premiums for others, some of whom faced serious cost burdens.

They spent some time over the next 12 months refining their work. They sent a note to Whitlam that said their concepts were 'interesting but totally impractical'. According to Deeble, nothing happened for some months until Whitlam announced a program that was exactly what they had recommended. Think about that for a moment. You are in opposition. You have got no resources. You are trying to deal with complex policy matters like health. You are trying to deal with a complex insurance model like what is now the foundation stone of Medicare, and you come up with that and you deliver that from opposition.

If you look at what the party took to the 1972 election in relation to education, the It's Time education policy was that the Australian Labor Party 'will abolish fees at universities and colleges of advanced education'. This was to support the principle that tertiary education should be provided on the basis of merit rather than private financial means. Again, think about that for a moment. How many members of this place – and I am one of them – got to experience university and were the first in their families to do so? We were able to experience that because of these reforms that Race championed while leading Gough's office. Finally, on that point, in the same speech Gough said:

> We will legislate to give aborigines land rights – not just because their case is beyond argument, but because all of us as Australians are diminished while the aborigines are denied their rightful place in this nation.

All of this is work that Race was intimately involved with and championed, and it changed so much about the way in which we govern. I sometimes say it is not so much about why I am here or why we are here or what the things are we want to do; it all comes down to the how. I sometimes say that Gough Whitlam and Abigail did not have many things in common but they both relied upon the number 96 for their careers – in Abigail's case, the show; in Gough's case, section 96 of the constitution, which enabled for the very first time a federal government to tie federal funding to achieve its policies by working in harmony with the states. Again, if it was not for that, we would not have those profound national policies which we have all benefited from.

Race was elected to this place at a time when the opposition had a significant swing to them, and if you talk to people like David White, who were members of the other place at that time, they knew that they were coming. They picked up 11 seats, and there was apparently a caucus election for the shadow cabinet at that stage because everyone knew if you were in shadow cabinet you had every chance of being a minister. Race was the Shadow Minister for Economic Development. It is true, I think, that the portfolios, in a substantive sense, of arts and police have not been united since Race held those portfolios, though I was the acting Minister for Police for six months while I was also the Minister for Creative Industries, and I have got to say it is a joy to sprint from force command to the water wall. What I would say too is that when Race opened up the arts centre he described it as an arts city within a city – a vibrant, living part of a great metropolis.

I think it is important to note some of the things that Race did in that portfolio as well. He introduced concessional ticket prices for the arts. He had a focus on providing arts access to people with a disability. He committed funding, and he built off the great work of Hamer. Hamer was a fantastic arts minister, and I seem to recall – I could have this wrong – that when the arts centre was opened the Cain government asked Sir Rupert to officiate at the opening because they recognised his leadership in the space. Race built off that work. They provided funding for regional art galleries. He opened the children's museum at the Melbourne Museum, and anyone who goes to the museum now knows the focus on having a safe space for young children to go at the museum is extraordinary. He established the Premier's Literary Awards and the Melbourne Writers Festival in 1985 and 86. The last time I met Race, he came and saw me at the Essendon electorate office, and he talked about the importance of trying to preserve the W-class trams, some of which were those art trams. Clifton Pugh had done some of that work.

I think the wonderful thing about Race is that he was always inquiring. He was always inquisitive. He was a great servant of this great party. He was a fantastic minister of the Crown. He was an outstanding member of Parliament. But leading an office like Gough's at that time, those five years, completely redefined this nation, completely changed the way in which we view ourselves and view our role in the world and completely changed the way in which public administration is delivered in this nation. That is something that is just awe-inspiring. To Iola and to his family: you should just be so incredibly proud of his legacy and his achievement. Vale, Race Mathews.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (12:45): I rise today to acknowledge the passing of the Honourable Dr Race Mathews, former federal member for Casey and state member for Oakleigh. In Victoria Race held ministerial portfolios of community services, police and emergency services and the arts. However, it is Race's years after holding these roles that I want to touch on today. In the 2000s Race became active in local Labor branches and in the Higgins federal electorate. Race believed in active and well-functioning branches. He believed in Labor members who championed progressive politics, and he led the development of policy ideas. And it was this belief in the power of Labor members that led him to establish Local Labor, a network of Labor activists across the state that led policy development and policy reform. Race proudly supported candidates in the Higgins federal electorate and surrounding state electorates, and after years and years of hard work and persistence, Labor won Higgins in 2022. I acknowledge Race for his role in laying the foundations for that successful campaign many years prior.

I think it is admirable that Race dedicated much of his time in later years to policy development and encouraging the next generation of activists to step up. I admired Race deeply. This was a man who walked alongside my heroes Gough Whitlam and Jim Cairns. And as I came to know Race, I quickly realised that he too was a hero of our labour movement. As a young university student I remember attending many local Labor forums and events that Race organised. He encouraged young people to speak up and have their say, and he valued our contributions. He was patient with our questions and gently steered us along the right pathway. He was so incredibly generous with his time and always, always had time for a chat. Race inspired a generation of young Labor members and set an example for us to follow.

Race has many legacies that we have heard from members about today. I will never forget his selflessness, patience and kindness and his dedication and deep commitment to our labour movement. I extend my deepest condolences to Iola and the Mathews family. Vale, Race Mathews.

Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:48): I move:

> That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Honourable Dr Race Mathews, the house now adjourns until 2 pm today.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 12:48 pm.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER took the chair at 2:02 pm.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would like to acknowledge in the gallery a delegation from the Republic of Fiji: Speaker of the Fiji House of Representatives the Honourable Filimone Jitoko, the Honourable Kalaveti Ravu, the Honourable Sachida Nand and the Honourable Vijay Nath, as well as staff of the Fijian Parliament. Welcome, everyone.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Ambulance services

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, Victorians are dying due to the government's failing health system. A Blackburn

man called 000 twice as he lay bleeding, but it was nearly 5 hours before an ambulance turned up and paramedics found he had died. How is it that in suburban Melbourne a man who needed emergency treatment and care died because no ambulance was available?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:03): Of course my thoughts are with the family and friends of the man who has lost his life, acknowledging that this is a very difficult time for them as well as for the paramedics who found this man at his home. As is appropriate, Ambulance Victoria are undertaking an investigation into this matter and it is being referred to the coroner. I will take the time to hear from the coroner when it comes to ascertaining the cause of this man's death. But I will say this, because the Leader of the Opposition has asked me about what we are doing in order to address ambulance response times in this state, and I want to make a couple of comments in relation to this. We have a plan that we are implementing, which is paying dividends, and I will tell you why.

Members interjecting.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: You have asked the question. The recent report on government services has indicated that, while we have more to do, the response times here in Victoria remain better than in other comparable jurisdictions. We are also investing in our ambulance services and in many alternative care pathways, as people in this house know. As I have said, though – I have responded to the question – I will await the findings of the coroner before I provide any further commentary on this matter.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): Minister, the man that has died was a nurse. He had provided care to sick and vulnerable Victorians for his entire working life, yet when he was vulnerable the emergency health care he needed was not there because the system is broken. Minister, will you apologise to this man's family for the failing of the health system at his time of need?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:05): As I have already indicated, this matter is being investigated by Ambulance Victoria and will be referred to the coroner. At the beginning –

Bridget Vallence: Deputy Speaker, on a point of order on relevance, the minister is straying from the very, very narrow question: will she provide an apology to this man's family?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question asked.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Before I was interrupted I was about to go on to say that I commenced my response to the first question by expressing my condolences and sorrow for what has happened, something I have not yet heard from those on the other side.

Ministers statements: community safety

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): In our government we believe in keeping the community safe. That is the priority of our government, which is why we have introduced the toughest bail laws in the country. It is why we have youth offenders –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: And I am grateful for the opportunity to once again remind the house that they were opposed by those opposite. It is why high-risk youth offenders are now being tracked with electronic monitoring. It is why – I will repeat – high-risk youth offenders are now being tracked with electronic monitoring. It is why we are introducing Australia's first machete ban, banning machetes from our streets, taking these dangerous weapons out of the hands of violent offenders. And today it is why we are also introducing new laws that target those who commit those serious crimes and then post about them online.

This is a trend that we have seen emerge in recent years. It is dangerous; it is also disgusting. It not only puts lives at risk but, thinking of the victim and how they are retraumatised long after the crime has taken place, spreads fear, encourages copycat behaviour and turns criminal acts into some sort of twisted form of status. It is calculated and it is harmful, and that is why we are putting a stop to it, making it a criminal offence for offenders to promote or glorify their crimes online. I will say this very clearly: if you commit an offence and post it to boast, you will face extra jail time on top of the original penalty.

We believe in respect, responsibility and a system that stands with victims. Victorians have every right to feel safe on their streets and in their homes, and we will strengthen the laws to ensure this happens.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the Leader of the Opposition, I acknowledge in the gallery former member for Pascoe Vale and minister Christine Campbell. Welcome back.

Ambulance services

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Minister for Health. Last Friday the coroner brought down their findings on Christina Lackmann, who died in 2021 waiting for an ambulance. The department did an internal investigation and made its recommendations, and on 21 May this year it was reported that all seven recommendations had been implemented. Minister, if these recommendations have been implemented, why is the system still failing and why has another Victorian tragically died waiting for an ambulance?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:09): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. As I have outlined many times in this place, our ambulance services here in Victoria and indeed right around the nation are facing unprecedented demand. The increase in demand has been in the order of 35 per cent since before COVID, and we also know that we are seeing a persistent and very high number of 000 call-outs. Indeed we have a lights-and-sirens response to around a thousand cases every single day. Knowing all of this and with this demand, that is why our government continues to invest into our ambulance services to ensure that we have alternative pathways available, including urgent care clinics and the –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the minister is debating the question. People are dying waiting for ambulances. I ask you to ask the minister to come back to the question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Evelyn, I am sure, knows that a point of order is not an opportunity for debate.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I was saying, in recognising the challenge that our ambulance services face here in Victoria, which is similar to the challenges being faced by ambulance services right around Australia and indeed around the world, our government is implementing a range of reforms. I was very pleased that this year's budget included an additional $84.2 million which is dedicated to regional and rural ambulance resourcing. We are also investing a further $58.4 million into our emergency departments to commission further short-stay units and ensure that we have got greater capacity to bring on additional beds in times of peak need.

In February of this year I announced the standards for safe and timely ambulance and emergency care, and these are about ensuring that across our busiest hospitals and our busiest emergency departments we have standards in place that will drive down the time it takes to transfer a patient from the ambulance to the emergency department and then through the hospital. We have a range of reforms that we are implementing, and can I say that we are doing this with our workforce. I know that the initiatives that we are implementing will work because they have been designed in partnership and by listening to our frontline healthcare workers, because we will always respect them.

Bridget Vallence: Deputy Speaker, I renew my point of order. The minister is debating the question. This government has been in power for 10 years. People are dying waiting for ambulances. I would ask you to ask her to come back to the question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask that points of order be succinct. The minister was being relevant to the question asked in regard to talking about the health system and ambulance response times and implementations. The minister has concluded her answer.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): Given the continued failings in our health system, why won't the minister commission an independent inquiry?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:13): Can I just say I take this issue very, very seriously, and I am not using it as a political football, like some in this house are. That is why our government is making the investments and working with our workforce and implementing reforms to save people's lives.

Ministers statements: community safety

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:14): On National Police Legacy Day, caring for police families, we give a shout-out to members of our blue family across the state. But I am here to talk about our nation-leading machete ban and the work that we are doing on that. We saw in particular the scenes at Northland recently, which are unacceptable. We know that. They have no place in this state. But we do know that for those affected by knife crime – and the member for Melton knows from his work as a paramedic the horrific injuries that knives can inflict on people when people go about things in the wrong way – we need to hold those offenders to account.

We know that last year alone Victoria Police seized some 14,000 edged weapons from the community. That is in part because of the laws that have been changed by our government, where we can stop, seize them and search people in this state more often for longer right across the state, and that is why some 14,000 edged weapons were taken off our street last year alone. We are expanding our search powers. Make no mistake that there are no excuses for carrying knives here in Victoria.

There is $13 million in this year's budget to deliver our machete ban this year. That will start on 1 September. We have got our Minister for Consumer Affairs, and I want to give him a shout-out for the work that they are doing already to see Amazon, eBay and other online retailers removing these machetes from sale. We have seen nearly 400 in-store inspections already from the crack team down there at Consumer Affairs Victoria, and I want to thank the minister for his leadership and work.

This is a national issue, and the Police Ministers Council will be dealing further with these matters as retailers across the country want to get on board and support what our government is doing to rid our streets of machetes to keep people safe. We will have more to say on these matters as we roll out our communications campaign. The bins are being put in place at our 24-hour police stations. We are going to make sure that we get these dangerous machetes off our streets and keep the community safe.

Health system

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:16): I have a question for the Minister for Health. Simranjit, also a nurse, recently presented to an emergency department with severe pain and spent over a week in hospital waiting for an MRI to determine the cause. Why are patients spending a week in a hospital bed waiting for essential diagnostic investigations?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:16): I thank the member for Eildon for her question. I did not catch the name of the patient that she referred to, nor did she refer to the health service. As is my practice in this place, if a person from any side of politics wants to raise a matter regarding an individual patient's care, I am more than happy to follow that up and find out exactly what has happened.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it was not about an individual's care. It was about the diagnostic investigations generally in the health services that people are having to wait for.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister to come to the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I have answered the question.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:17): Clearly I missed the answer. Minister, when will your government fix the health system so that Victorians get the timely diagnostic assessments they desperately need?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:18): I am really proud of the investments that our government has made in our health service system, including $31 billion into our hospitals this year, and we have a pipeline of $15 billion of health infrastructure spending. With regard to diagnostic testing, there are a range of factors at play in any individual's care, but we are proud here in this state that we are able to deliver timely care. We do have a plan. We have implemented a range of reforms already, with more to come. I again thank our hardworking healthcare workers for everything that they do every single day to ensure that Victorians, no matter where they live, get the care that they need. I re-extend my invitation to the member to share with me her individual constituent's issue.

Ministers statements: workplace safety

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:19): I am delighted to rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is taking even more action to keep Victorians safe, and I want to focus on an issue that affects thousands of hardworking Victorians right across our state, including many young Victorians. These are our workers in our shops, cafes, pubs and restaurants and the workers on our trains, trams and buses. These are the workers who show up every day to serve the public and keep our communities running. They deserve respect. They deserve to feel safe and be safe on the job. They sure do not deserve verbal and physical abuse just for doing their job. A recent national survey from the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association found that 87 per cent of customer-facing workers experienced abuse from customers and physical violence against these workers has risen by over 50 per cent since 2021. Here in Victoria, the figures are up too.

This is simply unacceptable. That is why our government is taking strong, decisive action to better protect customer-facing workers. We are working on new laws which will send the strongest, clearest message that attacks against retail, transport and hospitality workers are not just wrong, they are criminal. We are considering tougher, stronger penalties for both new and expanded offences and stronger protections against stalking, harassment or intimidation in the workplace. To ensure these reforms are meaningful and balanced, we have established the worker protection consultation group, bringing together industry, unions and community voices. I thank members of the group for their valuable contributions. We will be introducing legislation later this year, legislation that protects workers and holds offenders accountable. No-one should face abuse just for doing their job.

Housing

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:21): My question is to the Premier. Premier, we all know that we are in a housing crisis. One-third of all Australians seeking support for homelessness services live right here in Victoria, and our priority applicants on the public housing waiting list are waiting over 17 months for a home. Yet in Victoria housing is still largely treated like a commodity or an investment rather than a basic human right, which we know that it is because the simple fact is all humans need a place to live. Yet the right to housing is not enshrined in Victoria's human rights charter. Our charter has 27 other rights – equality, the right to religion, even the right to vote – but not the right to housing. Premier, will your government add housing as a right under our human rights charter here in Victoria?

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister for economic growth is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:22): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. The member for Melbourne started her question with a reference that we all know that Victoria, and indeed Australia, is in a housing crisis. Well, I wish we all did. I wish all members of the house and this Parliament did know that we need to take more action to get more homes built so more Victorians, particularly young Victorians, can have the opportunity to buy their first home close, perhaps, to where they grew up, close to family and loved ones and close to jobs, public transport services and other things they want to access to grow their future. I wish everyone in this Parliament did know that, because if they did we would not have seen the Liberal Party and the National Party and the Greens political party team up a couple of weeks ago in the Legislative Council and try and block the building of more homes in train and tram activity zones.

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Premier is clearly misleading the house. Please bring her back to the answer.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Melbourne.

Jacinta ALLAN: Let me remind the member for Melbourne what her colleagues and the Liberal Party and the National Party did in the Legislative Council just a couple of weeks ago. They teamed up. And it is not the first time, Deputy Speaker; I know you know that in your community in Ashwood. Whether you are in Fitzroy or Collingwood, the Markham estate or Bills Street in Hawthorn – the good old member for Brighton over there – we know that this is a repeat pattern of behaviour.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: He loves it when we mention the member for Brighton. It is a repeat pattern of behaviour. I go back to the member for Melbourne's opening statement. If we do all know in this place that we have to do more to address the building of more homes, then why are the member for Melbourne and her colleagues getting in the way of exactly that task?

I say this to the proposition that is being put by the member for Melbourne: on this side of the house, this government – my government – is focused on action, not words on a piece of paper. We are focused on action, and that action is in building more homes in train and tram activity zones; having a 10-year pipeline of land so we can build more family homes in the outer suburbs; making sure that we are working with local government to have more land released; making sure that we can have the planning changes introduced that make Melbourne the townhouse capital of the nation; and making sure we are working at supporting regional workers to have accommodation close to where they work, which is great for businesses and great for those regional workers. They are the actions that I am focused on, not the proposition from the member for Melbourne.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:26): I have to say I am surprised to see our Premier refer to our Victorian human rights charter as 'just words'. Several parliamentary inquiries in Victoria have recommended including the right to housing in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, including the 2021 inquiry into homelessness and the 2023 parliamentary inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis. The Labor government responded by saying these recommendations are 'under review'. Premier, what is the status of that review?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:26): What I am focused on is not reviewing past actions and past recommendations but taking action, making sure more Victorians have the dignity of a roof over their head. If the Greens political party wanted to join with us in supporting more Victorians to have the dignity of a roof over their head, they would support the redevelopment of the public housing towers.

Tim Read: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Premier is halfway through her response and we have not gone near the question about the review.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will take it that is on relevance. The Premier was being relevant to the question asked. The Premier to continue without assistance.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is the difference between the Labor government and the Greens political movement: we take action. We get on and deliver infrastructure. We deliver housing for Victorians. We are not interested in grandstanding. We are not interested in running off to the courts to try and get housing blocked for those vulnerable Victorians who need it the most. That is what I say very clearly to the member for Melbourne. My focus is on action and getting more homes built for more Victorians.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Frankston can leave for half an hour.

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: LGBTIQA+ equality

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:28): It is Pride Month, and our government continues to stand with Victorian LGBTIQA+ communities. Whether it is this celebration or whether it is passing meaningful law reform, we will continue working to ensure all Victorians can live safely, wholly and freely. In April we passed anti-vilification legislation to protect gender identity, sexuality, sex characteristics and disability from the harms of hate speech. Last month our machete ban responded directly to unacceptable violence that has harmed Victorians, including members of the LGBTIQA+ community. And today the Attorney-General introduced reforms that apply tougher penalties for anyone posting and boasting about serious crime. We are showing that we will never tolerate this behaviour in Victoria. We know LGBTIQA+ Victorians, particularly gay and bisexual men, have been targeted by offenders who post and boast about their unacceptable and hateful crimes.

While every month should be a celebration of our diverse rainbow communities, it is important to recognise Pride Month, and I strongly encourage every member of this place to be united, not divisive, and to do all they can to show our LGBTIQA+ communities they are seen, supported and loved. Of course this includes standing up to hate, violence and discrimination, whether it is during Pride Month, on Trans Day of Visibility or right here in Parliament. We will always push back on hate, strengthen community safety and keep in view those who refuse to stand up for our rainbow communities. Whether it is connecting with people online, at school, at work, at your sports club or in public, every Victorian deserves to live safely and with pride.

Country Fire Authority

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:30): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. What is the CFA base budget for 2025–26?

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The minister for economic growth is very, very close.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the minister for economic growth has already been warned.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would say reflections on the Chair are not parliamentary or orderly.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:31): I guess that question really speaks more to some of the behaviour and the questions that we saw asked at PAEC, which he is clearly disappointed he is no longer a member of, rather than choosing to use the opportunity at PAEC to fully pursue what is happening in our budget. I can tell you that in the emergency services portfolio we have seen investment of nearly $2 billion in this budget. It is important to note that that is more –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order on the question of relevance, Deputy Speaker, I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The minister for economic growth can leave the chamber for half an hour – and the member for Croydon, half an hour.

Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs and member for Croydon withdrew from chamber.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Deputy Speaker, there is no point of order. The minister on her feet was being entirely relevant to the question, which, as I recall, pertained to the CFA and the funding that this government has made – the budget of the CFA – and that is exactly what the minister was referring to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question asked.

Vicki WARD: As I was saying, this budget invests nearly $2 billion in our emergency services, and what that means is that more than double was invested in our emergency services than in the last budget of those opposite in 2014–15.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the minister is debating the question. It is very narrow: what is the CFA's base budget? Could you ask the minister to come back to that exceptionally narrow question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is entirely appropriate for the minister on her feet to compare and contrast the actions of this government with those on the other side in answering a question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister is being relevant to the CFA budget.

Vicki WARD: While those opposite are determined to pursue a narrative where they want to talk about us not investing in the CFA, the ongoing funding that we continue to put into the CFA and the fact that we continue to stand by –

Bridget Vallence: I will renew my point of order, Deputy Speaker: the minister is debating the question. We are not pursuing any narrative, we are asking a budget question – just a number. Could you ask the minister to come back to that very narrow question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister was responding and relevant to the question asked about the CFA budget. The minister to continue. I cannot direct the minister what to say, as you know.

Vicki WARD: As I was saying, the narrative that those opposite want to continue to pursue – which is that we do not fully fund the CFA, that we do not invest in the CFA and that we do not support the more than 50,000 volunteers in the CFA – is absolutely incorrect. In the last four years we have committed more than $1.5 billion to the CFA and their life-saving work. We do know that there is important investment in the CFA. This includes the $40 million that you, Premier – thank you very much – announced last December, which was the $40 million for rolling fleet replacement for the CFA.

Members interjecting.

Vicki WARD: They did miss that. Between the midyear budget and the 2025–26 Victorian budget, we have invested more than $60 million in the CFA.

Jacinta Allan: $40 million more than King Cut.

Vicki WARD: That is right. The member himself knows that budgeting for emergency services is quite complex, and if he looks to the annual report he knows that at the end of every financial year he is able to well understand what that funding is.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:37): The minister told the house in May that this information would be in the budget. It was not. The Treasurer published base funding in the *Government Gazette* on 30 May, showing a cut to the budget from previous years. The Treasurer, the minister and the Premier all then denied that this published figure was the CFA's budget. Can the minister put us in touch with anyone in the government who knows how much money our emergency services will receive next year, given Victorians are being slugged an extra $3 billion in tax in their name?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:38): If the Leader of the Nationals had been listening to the very start of my answer – in fact I think I had to –

Members interjecting.

Vicki WARD: As I said in my answer at the very start, there is close to $2 billion invested in this budget for our emergency services, which is exactly what the member's supplementary question asked.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order on the question of debating, Deputy Speaker, the former minister, the now Treasurer, gave us this figure in PAEC last year. Why can't the current minister give us a figure for 2025–26?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Points of order are not an opportunity for extra debate or to rephrase the question. The minister was being relevant to the question asked. The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: education system

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:39): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government's commitment to evidence-informed reform in the education –

Members interjecting.

Ben CARROLL: Your behaviour has been exemplary, member for Bulleen. He has got the blue tie back. He is clean-shaven – third time lucky. As soon as I get on my feet, in comes the salmon again.

Before I go any further, can I send my very best wishes to all the students sitting their general achievement test today. Can I give a special mention to the member for Wendouree's daughter Johanna Addison, who is doing year 11 at Loreto and doing her GAT, and we wish her all the very best. Please pass that on from the minister.

We are harnessing world's best practice in the Education State. We are supporting teachers and leaders with clear direction, impactful strategies, tools and resources to foster deep engagement in the classroom, because we want our classrooms to be where every student is challenged, supported and inspired to reach their full potential. That is why we are putting in place evidence-based, informed policies to ensure that students are motivated and that they have agency and connection – all those contributors to effective and engaging learning in the classroom. It is no accident that we are the Education State. We are going to make sure we make precious use of those million minutes that every student has with us from K to 12. That is why we lead the nation with important reforms, whether it be the mobile phone ban in schools, our secondary pathway reforms, our Respectful Relationships reforms or putting in place explicit instruction and the science of learning in every classroom. But we are not stopping. We want to ensure our students feel safe in the classroom. That is why we have doubled our investment for the schoolwide positive behaviour program. That is why I recently announced new powers for principals to suspend or expel students when they need to do so, because we know that every student deserves to feel safe at school in every classroom across our state.

Constituency questions

Gippsland South electorate

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:42): (1160) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, and I ask: when will Gippsland farmers be able to apply for on-farm drought infrastructure grants? The government announced on 15 May that it was extending the on-farm drought infrastructure grants to a number of new municipalities, including South Gippsland, Bass Coast and Baw Baw. On 15 May that was announced, yet here we are now on – what are we up to – 17 June, and Gippsland farmers still cannot apply for this. There is a question mark as to how useful this grant is to farmers who are in drought and already short of cash, but if the government is going to provide this, it should not be making an announcement and then asking farmers to wait more than a month to actually be able to apply. I know that since then the government has extended this across the state. How hard can it be to open the applications? Farmers are in need now. I have had contact from two different farmers today about it in South Gippsland. The government should get this open as quickly as possible.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:43): (1161) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources regarding the next $100 power saving bonus for concession card holders. In the 2025–26 state budget I was delighted to hear that the Allan Labor government is continuing to support households with concession cards with a $100 power saving bonus later this year, in time for winter bills. It is no secret that Ballarat is a cool place to live, but in winter it is truly cold, even freezing, with below zero overnights and icy mornings. Keeping warm is a necessity but can be costly. My question is: when will my constituents in the electorate of Wendouree with an eligible concession card be able to apply for the one-off $100 power saving bonus? I thank the minister for her support of low-income households in my community, and I am proud that the $100 power saving bonus this winter will make a real difference to the energy bills of the people who need it the most. I thank the minister and await her response.

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:44): (1162) My question is to the Minister for Police. In the past 12 months Nepean locals report that close to 25 businesses have been broken into, with more than 10 in Dromana alone. Over recent months a local pub, an Indian restaurant, a hairdresser and a pizza shop have all been targeted, some for the second time. This comes as the Allan Labor government makes cuts to the Victoria Police budget for 2025–26, a decision that defies comprehension. My community is calling for stronger laws and enforcement powers and coordinated deterrence strategies to stop this worsening crime wave before more families and businesses are affected. Minister, why does the government continue to pretend their performative law reforms will address crime while in reality in my community it remains very different?

Werribee electorate

John LISTER (Werribee) (14:45): (1163) My constituency question is to the Minister for Carers and Volunteers. Last week I met with volunteers at the Wyndham Park Community Shed to see the fantastic work they do for our community. Volunteers there proudly showed me their bike repair work, where they supply good-quality second-hand bikes to families who ordinarily could not afford one. They showed me their excellent woodworking and metal shops, their tool library, which was set up with support from this government, as well as their community garden. The Wyndham Park Community Shed is an amazing set-up and worthy of the support of this government, something which we have given them over the years. Thank you to Reg, Peter, John, Benny, Khinh, Paul, Enzo and shed manager Daniel for their honest conversations about men's mental health and what our community needs. Minister, how can the government support men's sheds like the Wyndham Park Community Shed to continue to do their amazing work for our community?

Croydon electorate

David HODGETT (Croydon) (14:46): (1164) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it relates to the recently announced free public transport on a youth Myki card from 1 January 2026 for 18-year-olds as part of this year's Victorian state budget. This announcement makes a point of saying that the government supports the easing of cost-of-living pressures on families by offering free public transport for children under 18. However, there are many students who will be 18 at the commencement of the school year or be turning 18 throughout their final year of secondary education. Minister, will someone who is still a student and who is 18 or who turns 18 during their final year of school be able to continue to access free public transport on a youth Myki, or will they be forced to pay while they are still at school?

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:47): (1165) My constituency question is to the Minister for Environment. The container deposit scheme has been a roaring success. Millions upon millions – or, in the words of Trump, 'billions and billions' – have now been returned, with 10 cents going to so many Victorians and many locally in my part of Knox. My question to the minister is: how many containers have been returned in the City of Knox?

Just quickly as well, I want to give a shout-out to Alex Forkas, who makes a fantastic coffee. This is his final week here, and I want to say a huge thankyou to him. He is a fantastic bloke. He makes a mean hot lactose-free latte with an extra shot of coffee. Thank you very much to you, Alex. I wish you all the best. And as always, thank you to the entire parliamentary catering team.

Brunswick electorate

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:48): (1166) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing. Last year I was contacted by Brunswick constituent Vasu because his rent had increased by so much. Vasu was an ICU nurse at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, but with cancer and consequent vision loss, he now cannot work. Vasu got the disability support pension earlier this year, but rent for his one-bedroom apartment in Brunswick is now 80 per cent of his Centrelink allowance. Vasu's landlord recently issued a notice to vacate due to plans to sell, so Vasu has been searching for other accommodation without success. He has been on the public housing waiting list for five years. My question for the minister is: how will the government ensure that Vasu has appropriate accommodation?

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:48): (1167) My question is for the Minister for Local Government, and my question is: what levers do local councils and the state government have to address the issue of abandoned shopping trolleys? I raise this issue particularly thinking of the streets around Preston North East Primary and Crevelli Street, where unfortunately dumped trolleys and dumped rubbish have been a longstanding problem. Every time we doorknock down there, people raise it. We often go down and count up the trolleys ourselves, with often 30 or 40 in that little area, so we can report it to Northland Coles, Woolworths, Kmart, Aldi and others. We appreciate there are complex reasons why people dump rubbish and dump trolleys. Obviously not having a car is sometimes part of the issue, but nonetheless it has a significant negative impact on those communities and those neighbourhoods. It makes them feel uncared for and can lead to stigmatisation, and we will be grateful for any information the minister can provide about how we can work with Darebin council to find a long-term solution for this problem that works for everyone.

Sandringham electorate

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:49): (1168) My constituency question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Residents in Mentone and around Mentone station are deeply concerned about the proposal of a development on the land at 79 Balcombe Road, near Mentone station. This development risks significantly undermining the character of the local area – an area the community,

including groups like the Friends of Mentone Station and Gardens, has worked hard to preserve. Residents were informed through a confusing letter filled with technical planning language making it difficult to understand the full implications of draft amendment GC264. In response concerned locals have taken matters into their own hands, forming the Stop the Tower – Save Mentone group to raise awareness and help the community understand what the government does not want the community to understand. Therefore I ask: will the minister guarantee that the heritage livability of Mentone will not be compromised by the government's plan to develop this parcel of land?

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:50): (1169) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the question is: how will the recent announcement of extended bus services in Tarneit positively impact my community? Currently bus routes 170 and 180 end in the early evening, meaning that passengers are unable to participate in activities after dark unless they have access to a motor vehicle. That is why we are adding 470 additional services every week. These new timetables will feature more evenly spaced trips, with services running now on average every 20 minutes. These changes will make it easier for local residents to go to work, train stations and shops, regardless of the time of day. When you pair this with free public transport next year for Victorians under the age of 18, our students will have access to easy, free transport to go not just to and from school but also to after-school and social activities. I am proud to be part of a government that is listening to the needs of our community and introducing much-needed additional services through the local area. I encourage everybody to jump on the Public Transport Victoria app and check out these increased services.

David Hodgett: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I wish to raise the matter of an outstanding response – it is overdue – to constituency question 960 asked on 5 February this year, which was due on 7 March 2025. Could you raise that with the relevant minister? And if appropriate, while I have got the floor, there is also outstanding adjournment matter 971. The adjournment was asked on 4 February 2025 and was due on 6 March 2025. Could you bring that to the attention of the minister so that I may be able to respond to my constituents for the matters I have raised.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I too would like to draw your attention to a number of questions not answered by and overdue from the Minister for Public and Active Transport: questions on notice 2309, 2312 and 2314. I would be grateful for a response.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That will be passed on.

Bills

Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:53): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Crimes Act 1958 to provide for a new offence in relation to the publication of material about the commission of certain offences and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:53): I ask the minister to provide a brief explanation of the bill.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:53): The Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025 will introduce a standalone performance crime offence into the Crimes Act 1958, cracking down further on offenders by criminalising the act of sharing their crimes on social media and messaging apps. The bill targets those who post and boast about serious crimes such as affray, burglary and robbery, car theft, home invasions and violent disorder.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Announcements

Assistant clerks

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (14:54): Under section 18 of the Parliamentary Administration Act 2005, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly has appointed Paul Groenewegen to be Assistant Clerk Committees and Joel Hallinan to be Assistant Clerk Procedure and Serjeant-at-Arms, effective 2 June 2025. Congratulations, gentlemen.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (14:54): General business, notices of motion 21 and 22 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 5 pm today.

Petitions

Flood mitigation

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) presented a petition bearing 4335 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the concerns of land owners of East Victoria, including Loch Sport, with regard to the current flood overlay conditions. While we acknowledge and appreciate the government's commitment to public safety, we believe that these regulations have become overly restrictive and are having unintended consequences on local development, economic growth, individuals' retirement plans and the overall quality of life for residents.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to

1. Review and revise the revised flood overlay conditions to allow for more flexibility as current home owners while maintaining a focus on safeguarding against genuine flood threats.
2. Introduce a tiered approach to flood risk management that takes into account varying flood risks in different areas, and allows for more tailored regulations that will enable responsible development without compromising safety.
3. Provide support for property owners and businesses affected by the flood overlay conditions, including offering financial assistance, incentives for flood mitigation measures, or exceptions in cases where risk is demonstrably low.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow on motion of Martin Cameron.

Drivers licences

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) presented a petition bearing 176 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the concern with the minimum driving age in Victoria.

Other states have set in place restrictions that give greater freedoms to citizens aged under 18 with regards to operating a motor vehicle alone on a restricted licence.

If an individual completes their 120 hours of supervised driving and pass the required assessments at 17 years of age, it will allow more young Victorians to enter the workforce and gain additional freedoms.

It would mean Victorians aged 17 would not be dependent on parents or other full licence drivers to attend school, work, visit friends or attend other events.

Victorians in regional communities are also disproportionately affected by the current system, given limited or no access is available to public transport.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly amends the Road Safety Act 1986 (Vic) to allow those who have completed all relevant tests and qualifications to apply for a driver licence from 17 years of age.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow on motion of Martin Cameron.

Housing

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) presented a petition bearing 624 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that Victoria is in a housing crisis, with more people facing homelessness, housing insecurity, and financial stress due to rising housing costs. Housing supply has not kept pace with demand, leaving many Victorians without access to affordable, secure, and safe housing.

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 protects various human rights, but it does not explicitly recognise housing as a basic human right. This gap leaves many Victorians without adequate legal protection or recourse when facing housing difficulties.

All Victorians should have safe, secure and affordable housing.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly amend the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 to include the right to housing.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Committees

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2022/23

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:57): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Integrity and Oversight Committee on the performance of the Victorian integrity agencies 2022–23, together with an appendix and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and appendix be published.

Standing Orders Committee

Inquiry into Including Sessional Orders and Ongoing Resolutions in the Standing Orders

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (14:57): I have the honour to present to the house interim report 2 from the Standing Orders Committee on including sessional orders and ongoing resolutions in the standing orders, together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 8

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:58): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 8 of 2025, on the following acts and bills:

Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Act 2025 – house amendments

Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 – house amendments

Retirement Villages Amendment Act 2025 – house amendments

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025

Statute Law Revision Bill 2025

Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Essential Services Commission – Report on the Port of Melbourne Market Rent Inquiry 2025

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 4/2025 *(Gazette G22, 29 May 2025)*

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Boroondara – C398

Brimbank – C244

Darebin – C210

Glen Eira – C267

Greater Bendigo – C263

Greater Geelong – C475, C478

Melbourne – C480

Moyne – C83

Port Phillip – C223, C226

Queenscliffe – C40

Whitehorse – C258

Yarra Ranges – C207

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 – SR 46

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – SR 41

Electricity Safety Act 1998 – SR 40

Forests Act 1958 – SRs 34, 42

Freedom of Information Act 1982 – SR 32

Land Act 1958 – SR 43

Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014 – SR 33

Meat Industry Act 1993 – SR 31

Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – SR 47

National Parks Act 1975 – SR 44

Partnership Act 1958 – SR 39

Road Safety Act 1986 – SR 36

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – SR 37, 48

Surveying Act 2004 – SR 35

Tobacco Act 1987 – SR 38

Wildlife Act 1975 – SR 45

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

Dairy Act 2000 – Dairy Food Safety Victoria Determination of Licence Classes and Fees for Dairy Businesses 2025

Education and Training Reform Act 2006 – Ministerial Order No 1468 – Order Amending Ministerial Order No 1125 – Procedures for Suspension and Expulsion of Students in Government Schools

Wildlife Act 1975 – Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 7/2025 *(Gazette S259, 28 May 2025)*.

Bills

Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025

Council's agreement

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (14:59): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 without amendment.

Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Council's amendments

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:00): I have also received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025

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

Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024

Royal assent

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:00): I inform the house that on 3 June 2025 the Lieutenant-Governor gave royal assent to the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025, the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024 and the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024.

Business of the house

Program

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:00): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 19 June 2025:

Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025.

As always, I am proud to stand in this place as Leader of the House bringing our Allan Labor government business program to the chamber for consideration. It has been a couple of weeks since we were last in the house, and I want to begin by acknowledging the hard work of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for all that they have done over the last couple of weeks. I certainly enjoyed my time with them, and I thank government members in particular for the insightful questions that they asked and the opportunity that that then provided to talk about some of the investments that our

government is making. I note the member for Mildura is in the chamber, so I want to acknowledge her as well and say that I had the opportunity to respond to a number of questions that she had in relation to the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Mildura health and palliative care, as well as a range of other issues. I thank her for her inquiries during that time.

Our government has always invested in the services that Victorians need and in the infrastructure that drives productivity in this state because we want to ensure that we do everything to keep our economy strong. Despite the challenges that we have faced as a result of a once-in-100-years pandemic – the disruptions to global supply chains, which I am sure we are all familiar with – and the fact of international conflict and the impact that that has on cohesion for our community and also on our economy, our government continues to work hard every day to ensure that we have an economy that works for Victorians, not the other way around. I have always thought that this really outlines to me the key difference between the Labor side of politics and the Liberal side of politics: whereas we are on the side of people, those on the other side are on the side of capital. Let us keep it that way, because the people of Victoria respond very well to what it is that we have to offer, and indeed this government business program continues to deliver on those commitments.

The Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 enshrines public sector accountability, elevating convention and current practice into a law enhancing Victoria's financial management framework. At its heart the bill is all about boosting transparency and accountability and improving public sector management and reporting. Also on the government business program is the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I think it is very clear to anyone that has spent any time in this place over recent months that this is a government that is absolutely focused on the primacy of community safety. We have enacted a range of laws that are designed to do just that: ensure that people are safe in our communities. But of course we also believe that safety should be extended to everyone. In my role as Minister for Health I have a particular passion for ensuring the safety of our healthcare workers, and this bill that we will be debating will extend that right to custodial officers, because we know that it is a difficult and complex job working in our corrections system. I am glad that we are bringing a bill to be debated in this house that will ensure that custodial officers are safe at work and that assaults on custodial officers are treated with the gravity and seriousness that they deserve.

Finally, the house will be debating the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025. Our government remains absolutely committed to improving road safety outcomes across Victoria, and the reforms in this bill will deliver improvements to our road safety regulatory framework and support processes to better detect those drivers who are doing the wrong thing. Better detection of road safety offences also serves as a general deterrent. We know that there are too many drivers still driving distracted by mobile phones and there are too many drivers driving without their seatbelts on, but it is important that we have the right legislation in place. That is what this does, and I commend this government business program to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (15:06): I too rise to speak on the government business program, but before I get into that I just want to commend the member for Pakenham and everyone involved in the Parliament Big Freeze event to raise vital funds for FightMND. The member for Pakenham is courageously fighting the beast, and I would like to pay tribute to all of those who took the plunge – particularly the Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Liberal Party, the Leader of the Nationals and the member for Gippsland East, who all contributed and raised vital funds for this very important cause.

In terms of the government business program, the government is introducing the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This is contentious because this is the Labor government using it as an opportunity to avoid scrutiny and budget reporting. This Labor government, a decade-old Labor government, shows the hallmarks of failing on accountability, being secretive and lacking transparency. If you look at the detail in this bill, that is what you will see. Also, which government wants to try to avoid doing a budget update and financial reporting in an election year? This Allan Labor government.

The government business program also seeks to introduce the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025, something of an omnibus bill. It is interesting that this comes so soon after the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) hearings, where the Minister for Roads and Road Safety actually forgot that road safety was a key pillar of the government tackling the devastating road toll. At a time when Victoria's roads are pothole-ridden, road maintenance funding has been cut. We have several known dangerous roads right through my electorate, the Evelyn electorate, and indeed right across Victoria. Of particular note are those known dangerous roads Warburton Highway in Seville East, Maroondah Highway at Killara Road in Coldstream, and Hull and Mooroolbark roads in Mooroolbark. There has been no investment here to fix these known dangerous roads. This legislation would have been a great opportunity to address some of that and perhaps legislate finally fixing some roads in Evelyn, because that perhaps is the only way. We never see it in the budget.

The Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 – there are many important elements to this bill. We sought to go into consideration in detail to scrutinise this bill and truly get the best possible outcomes for Victorians, but the Allan Labor government and the Leader of the House denied this very reasonable request to go into consideration in detail on this bill. So we will be opposing the government business program and noting that, in the government business program, none of these bills are addressing the cost-of-living crisis that is impacting Victorians right now under the watch of this Allan Labor government. Even the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill the government is introducing, which introduces some financial reporting but really allows the minister to provide major carve-outs to government agencies without them actually needing to comply with the financial reporting obligations contained within this bill. It is shameful.

I want to take an opportunity also, given we have just come out of the budget period and PAEC over the last two weeks, to commend the excellent efforts of the opposition PAEC team. The members, Nick McGowan and Richard Welch in the other place and of course the member for Mildura Jade Benham, took that fantastic opportunity to hold this government to account and scrutinise this debt-laden budget – a budget that is soaring to $194 billion of debt, taxing Victorians to the hilt with some 63 new or increased taxes under this Labor government. The two members from the upper house Mr McGowan and Mr Welch and the member for Mildura did an excellent job on PAEC – a gruelling two weeks I know; I have been there and done that – and they did a stellar job of holding this government to account for their poor financial mismanagement.

Also, I would like to give a shout-out to Aunty Betty Soraghan of Kilmore, who just turned 105 years old. She is going strong. Happy birthday, Aunty Betty.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (15:11): Happy birthday, Aunty Betty, from me too. I am very pleased to take the opportunity to make a contribution on the government business program, and what a packed week we have, a really terrific and important legislative agenda. I look forward to the debates and the contributions from all sides.

As the Manager of Opposition Business did as well, I would like to make a note of commendation to the member for Pakenham for bringing us all together yesterday, as there were some extraordinary dunkees. I must note the dunkees' looks of fear as they went dropping into that cold water and the look of joy on the member for Pakenham's face as she undertook that role. I was very pleased to be able to watch and be a part of such a terrific Parliament. I know the Leader of the Nationals did mention yesterday some of what we get up to occasionally on the member for Pakenham's wheelchair; there is some joyful joy-riding that takes place in the annexe. That was a great way to start the parliamentary week.

I would also like to acknowledge the condolence motion to the Honourable Race Mathews and the wonderful contributions from people this morning who acknowledged an amazing Victorian, a person who contributed to the federal Parliament and very much contributed to the journey that this state has been on of progressive reform.

Speaking of the journey of progressive reform, here we are again with three really important pieces of legislation. The Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 is going to be making sure that resources are acquitted in a fiscally sustainable way, having regard to the decisions of government and to proper financial management.

I am very pleased as well that there will be important debate on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and I am going to take the opportunity, with indulgence, to thank the many people who work in the corrections system. This is a really important service to our community, and I know so many of the people who work in corrections take that role very seriously and consider that they are in service to our community. This bill will deliver recommendations from the review of the Serious Offenders Act 2018 to ensure community safety risks posed by serious offenders are appropriately managed and of course denounce assaults on custodial officers. The custodial officers I have met from my own constituency have spoken to me about the work that they do, and this is an opportunity, just while I have this time, to be able to thank them for that service. It is important work. We know that people who spend time in custodial sentences need really to be focused on very much. It is a professional outfit, and I also commend the work of their union, who are responsible for making sure that the people who are working in our corrections system are operating in safe, secure and well-paid conditions.

Finally, we will be debating the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025. This is going to enable better road safety outcomes by making updates and clarifications to the Road Safety Act 1986 to aid enforcement activities. Our government is getting on with really important work – again, even with this piece of legislation, it gives me the opportunity to acknowledge the work that our emergency services do, under extraordinary conditions – in making sure that people do undertake the activities that are necessary to stay safe and that people are operating what we do know to be a potentially lethal weapon, which is a car, in a way that is mindful of their responsibilities as road users.

I am disappointed that the opposition will not be supporting this terrific government business program. It is a progressive agenda, an agenda that the Victorian community have supported, an agenda that responds to the needs of our community. I know that the Manager of Opposition Business did say there were concerns about making sure there were cost-of-living measures. I do thank the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee as well for being able to take a granular look at the budget, because there is plenty there in responding to cost-of-living issues.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:16): I am more than happy to rise today to speak on the government business program. But of course, a couple of shout-outs first. As the Manager of Opposition Business also did, I send a huge shout-out to the member for Pakenham, her hardworking committee and everyone that took part in the very first Big Freeze at Parliament yesterday. The amount of money that was raised is incredible, and it is an incredibly important cause. We also had our local Big Freeze at Mildura Sporting Precinct on the weekend, raising another $42,000 for FightMND, which is absolutely sensational. So well done. It was nice to see the Leader of the Nationals have a haircut for the occasion.

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: I did notice, because I notice details, and the member for Gippsland East of course won the fashions on the field, which should become more of a focus perhaps in future years. Speaking of the Mildura Sporting Precinct, though, I do have to give a shout-out to the minister at the table, the Minister for Environment. It was about 30 seconds too late after my radio cross with Triple M yesterday that I had a message from the minister telling me that Lenny Kravitz is coming to the Mildura Sporting Precinct.

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: You have got my mobile number, Minister. I am sure you have, and if you have not now, then that is an invitation to be harassed by me leading up to Lenny Kravitz and the NFL at the MCG next year. And it was Matthew Stafford's jersey that you had on yesterday. I noticed that was not top of your mind, but yes, I am there with you. And if we could organise a meet-and-greet with Lenny Kravitz, that would sort me out until the end of days, I promise.

On the government business program, though: as the member for Evelyn did say, we are opposing the government business program this week, not out of routine but out of deep concern for the democratic process and putting these bills before the house this week to receive the scrutiny that the Victorian people deserve. The Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 is the first one up. After two weeks sitting in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, financial management is perhaps something that –

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: No, it was illustrated that this is something that perhaps those on the other side could take a course or several in. Corrections, as was spoken about earlier, will be an interesting bill. I note that all of my Nationals colleagues were very, very eager to speak on all bills this week, particularly the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025, which the Leader of the Nationals of course has a very strong interest in. He is full of all sorts of figures, statistics and knowledge – because knowledge is power, of course – and an incredible knowledge of potholes and what other uses they could be put to. In fact I have been using some on some of our highways for golf.

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: Eskies, yes, but also golf. There is the Mallee links golf course down a few highways throughout the Mallee. That will be coming to my social media sometime soon, which should be lots of fun.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Jade BENHAM: As the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety would understand, the road traffic on those highways sometimes is intermittent, and it is quite heavy sometimes.

Coming back to the government business program this week, it is again one – as the Manager of Opposition Business has said – we oppose because the request to take these bills to consideration in detail is again being denied. That does cause us great concern for the democratic process and for scrutiny, because that is our job in this house – to make sure that the legislation that is passed in this place is fit for purpose. Given that we have been denied that opportunity once again, it is only befitting that we do oppose the government business program again this week. But I am looking forward to the contributions from the Leader of the Nationals, who is speaking on a couple of things, I believe, this week and my colleagues to my left. As always – looking at the speakers list for bills – it is the Nationals of course, with broad shoulders and strong backs, that are holding up the speaking lists and doing what we can to make sure that regional Victoria's voice is heard loud and clear.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:20): I thank the member for Mildura for her contribution just now and in fact during the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings, where it was wonderful to have somebody from the Mildura tourism board with us who was promoting all the fabulous things to do. I think we have all booked flights to Mildura to visit these wonders, so I thank her for the contribution there, although I was surprised to hear her say that they are opposing the government business program because they want to have consideration in detail, because after my time in PAEC I would not say that detail is their strong suit. Getting down into the nitty-gritty was not something they demonstrated being across, so I find it quite bemusing. If we are going to have training – I think the training that has been suggested for us by the member opposite was financial management training – I suggest maybe team training or team building for those opposite. There were

a few mentions there of the Nationals holding up the agenda this week – we hear that on this side – so congratulations to the Nationals for keeping the band marching on this week.

It is a good week this week. We have the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 before the house. This builds on the good, strong record of this government in improving transparency and accountability in the financial management system of this state. Some examples of ways that we have improved it previously are around the gender-sensitive budgeting that was introduced by this government to make sure that in everything that we do we consider how it is supporting and benefiting girls and women around the state – a really important improvement that was made by this government.

We have not stopped making improvements. We see in the current budget papers an innovation of the new Treasurer regarding Treasurer's advances. This is another demonstration of transparency, where now in the budget papers you can see the general government output contingencies not allocated to departments and general government asset contingencies not allocated to departments – a further step of improving transparency in what is one of the strongest, most transparent and accountable government budgeting systems in the country.

The other bill that I want to mention is the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill makes it absolutely clear – 100 per cent and without a doubt – that we denounce assaults on custodial officers, that custodial officers are doing a fantastic service for the community in their roles, that they are roles that they take very seriously and very carefully and that we rely on them. But we rely on them not just in our facilities but also in our communities. I think of corrections officers such as Sukhwinder and Arshdeep in my community, who proudly represent everything that their community stands for both at work and at home. I think of their children, who play with my children, and the right for them to have parents that return home safe from work, uninjured and respected. I think of their strong role in our community, the volunteering that they do after hours, strengthening our community, giving depth to our community and building our community up, especially in the growing suburbs. So I thank the hardworking custodial officers from my community.

We have other legislation before the house, the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025. As we heard from the member for Cranbourne, this is around aiding enforcement activities. Despite what those opposite say, our record of funding in roads and road maintenance is absolutely far and above anything that those opposite ever did. The truth hurts, unfortunately, for those opposite. We need not look any further than this year's state budget's billion-dollar road blitz and the funding that will provide to strengthening our roads, just as we continue to strengthen our corrections services, our health services and our financial management in this state.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (15:26): I rise to speak on the government business program. But firstly I would like to join with the member for Evelyn and others in thanking all of those who participated in the Big Freeze event yesterday to fight MND, including the Leader of the Opposition, who got dunked in that cold, icy water. I am not sure about the Geelong top he was wearing, though. We also had the Leader of the Nationals, who came out of his volcanic lair – our own Dr Evil of sorts – and got dunked for the cause as well. Along with that, I would like to thank all the people here who supported my 27.5-kilometre trek for bowel cancer a couple of weekends ago.

Going to the government business program, this is one that yet again reflects Labor's ongoing pattern of weak accountability, economic mismanagement, taxes, bureaucracy and red tape. First up this week we have the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Members on this side will be keen to talk about the fact that this is a bill which is a direct attack on transparency at a time when Victoria's financial position is crumbling. Let us be honest, this is not about modernising financial rules, it is about weakening oversight at a time when oversight has never been more critical. Members of the opposition would also like to note that this bill scraps Governor-issued warrants for accessing public funds. It gives the Minister for Finance sweeping powers to exempt government agencies from transparency obligations, it removes budget reporting during election periods and it expands loopholes to shield declared bodies from scrutiny, including agencies like the Suburban Rail Loop – one would

have thought that, when you are going to spend over $200 billion of taxpayers money, scrutiny is important – and others like IBAC.

This links in with another item listed in the government business program, the budget take-note motion. This is at a time when the government is going towards a $194 billion debt in just a few years time, with taxpayers forking out $29 million a day – that is $1.2 million every single hour – in interest, resulting in Labor cutting already from schools and hospitals while increasing taxes, over 61 now, to cover their own mismanagement and more. This is a time when we actually need more transparency, not a reduction in transparency. Really this bill just recycles a failed 2017 proposal and weakens the very accountability mechanisms taxpayers rely on to know where their money is going. It is a travesty; it is a complete travesty.

Then we have the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The government want a pat on the back now for introducing reforms to tackle the prison violence crisis, a crisis which has exploded under their watch. Members on this side would like to talk about the fact that we have had 442 assaults on corrections staff in the past year, 10 of them sexual assaults, with staff being hospitalised, lockdowns across major facilities like the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and a 94 per cent no-confidence vote in Corrections Victoria's leadership. Members on this side will also point out that Labor cannot control crime outside of prisons, let alone inside. This government's incompetence truly knows no bounds. What is Labor's response? It is a bill that only protects some staff, not all.

This bill ultimately fails to provide vital protections to all prison workers, not just guards – the people preparing meals, providing health care and cleaning facilities. All that work in our corrections facilities, who work with many individuals who have been separated from the rest of society because they are a danger to others, face similar if not the same risks and deserve the same protections. While Labor claim they are strengthening safety, which they are for a few select individuals, let us be clear about what this is: a patch-up job.

Finally, we have the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025, an omnibus bill that addresses a range of different matters from maritime to transport regulation. In some regards some of these amendments make sense, but in many regards the reforms to consent for works on the road are more problematic. Labor has introduced a sneaky little provision, if I can put it that way, that removes deemed consent for roadworks applications and lets authorities stop the clock on project approvals. This goes further to their lack of road maintenance across Victoria. I am sure people like the member for Rowville, the member for Evelyn and the member for Mildura would not say that all their roads are up to scratch. Whether it is in Mildura, Rowville, Lilydale or elsewhere, our roads are struggling, and part of the reason is because Labor has got this state into so much debt.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (52): 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, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, 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, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (31): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, 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, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

National Police Legacy Day

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (15:36): Today is National Police Legacy Day. It is an opportunity to remember those who lost their lives protecting our community and the families who mourn them. I thank all of the men and women who serve and have served Victoria Police, and I also thank Victoria Police Legacy for their support of police families touched by tragedy.

Stephen Charles

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (15:37): I wish to pay tribute to the Honourable Stephen Charles AO KC, who died last week. Stephen was a respected member of the Victorian Bar for 64 years and served as an eminent judge of Victoria's Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. He had a great passion for integrity in public administration, and he advised the Baillieu coalition government on the establishment of Victoria's IBAC. A founding board member of the Centre for Public Integrity, His Honour was a principled voice for greater integrity in government. As I know through my dealings with him, he combined a piercing intellect with decency and courtesy. Vale, Stephen Charles.

Community Bank Malvern East

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (15:37): Last month saw Community Bank Malvern East celebrate its 25th anniversary. That is 25 years of serving my local community when so many of the big banks closed branches and turned their backs on East Malvern. A fantastic celebration dinner was held at Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club. It heard that the bank has returned over $6 million to the local community through grants and sponsorships. Thanks to founding chairman Peter Norman OAM and current general manager Ruth Hall for their vision and dedication, which has made such a great difference to my community.

Motor neurone disease

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (15:38): It has been humbling to attend so many events to talk about my journey with motor neurone disease and raise awareness of the important work underway to search for a cure to one day beat this beast of a disease. I have attended several local events, including the Hills MND Big Freeze in Emerald, John Henry Primary School's ice bucket fundraiser, the Pakenham Lions netball and football clubs to watch the amazing sliders and the Pakenham Warriors basketball Big V men's MND game. I was honoured to speak at the FightMND Big Freeze 11 MCG fundraiser lunch, cheer on the magnificent sliders and then deliver the match football to the umpires with my daughter Sienna – what a day. But the dearest event, closest to my heart, has been Freeze Parliament, with $53,000 raised so far. I am not exaggerating when I say that I love how, when it comes to supporting a great cause, the Parliament comes together as one from all sides of politics. Thank you to all the dunkees. Your bravery to not only live out your dress-up dreams but hit that icy water for FightMND was amazing. I want to thank Mitch Clarke and Carly Douglas for coming up with the idea and working very hard to make Freeze Parliament happen. To everyone who supported, donated to and sponsored this event, a heartfelt thankyou. Special thanks to FightMND's Matt Tilley and the team, Professor Brad Turner and Dr Thanuja Dharmadasa from the Florey and MND Victoria CEO Kate Johnson.

Mildura electorate motorsport

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:39): I will say it again and again and again: in Mildura we put champions on racetracks, with Mildura's own Brodie and Josh Waters, who have showcased exceptional talent and determination on both dirt and track over the past few weeks. At the 2025 Finke

Desert Race Brodie Waters delivered a remarkable performance, securing third place overall despite a challenging crash during the return leg. Incredible resilience gave Honda their first podium finish since 2014. Fellow Mildura rider Tyler Radford also made us proud – third place in his class. Brock Parker, Nick Boyd and a huge contingent from the region also travelled to Australia's premier desert race.

On the tarmac, Josh Waters continues to dominate the Australian Superbike Championship. His recent victory at Morgan Park Raceway extended his championship lead, underscoring his status as a formidable force in the series.

Finally, with all the work the Sunraysia Drag Racing Association have put in with their junior nationals dragster event, we are thrilled to announce that the 2025 event will be a points round of the Australian National Drag Racing Association national championship. It is a massive honour, and given the event is during the September school holidays, we know this will be a huge boost to our local economy. I will say it again: in Mildura we put champions on racetracks.

Mildura Riverfront Marathon Festival

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:41): Also, the second annual Mildura Riverfront Marathon Festival was held over the long weekend, attracting 800 participants.

Shabnam Safa OAM

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (15:41): I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate Shabnam Safa OAM on being awarded a King's Birthday honour. Shabnam is very much the pride of Cranbourne, and I thought that perhaps Cranbourne Secondary College might burst with joy because they are so proud of their alumnus. Shabnam is certainly somebody to be very proud of for her continuous work, always with great modesty, on behalf of refugee rights. As a woman who herself came to Australia from Afghanistan as a Hazara refugee, Shabnam is somebody I am so proud to have in our community. I would say the apple does not fall far from the tree, and her mother Rabia is a wonderful example of what makes our Cranbourne community in the south-east of Melbourne what it is. It is just a terrific place to represent.

Vinnies Cranbourne

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (15:42): I would like to take the opportunity, on another matter, to congratulate Vinnies Cranbourne and Anthony Hanna in particular for a wonderful day on Saturday raising funds and awareness for Vinnies.

Whitehorse United Soccer Club

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (15:42): Very quickly, alongside the member for Glen Waverley I would like to thank the Whitehorse United football club for the work that they did, in particular Kim Marrone, to raise funds for Thursday Girls, a charity close to my heart, recognising my good friend Janine Callanan and the whole Sexton clan there.

South-West Coast electorate community safety

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:42): I would like to present to the Parliament a petition signed by over 1100 concerned residents from south-west Victoria – people who are fed up with the escalating crime in their communities. In towns across our region we are seeing a surge in public nuisance, theft, violence, vandalism, public drunkenness and intimidation. There have even been horrifying knife attacks on innocent victims. Even a baby in a pram was kicked. In Portland theft from motor vehicles has increased by 173 per cent. In Warrnambool aggravated robbery has doubled. One victim told me the offender was back on the streets, bailed before the shopkeeper could even board up the smashed window. Our shopkeepers, workers and residents are feeling unsafe. Businesses are losing customers. Staff feel vulnerable.

We can be a community that both protects its citizens and supports those in need, but this government is doing neither. Despite two years of the Allan Labor government collecting a mental health levy, we have seen no increase in services. The need for a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in Warrnambool continues to be ignored. A feasibility study is simply a delaying tactic. The Allan Labor government is failing victims, failing communities and failing the police, who are under-resourced, frustrated and burnt out. The signatures on this petition send a clear message to the Premier: stop failing. It is time to act. That is why the community feels strongly, and that is why they have signed this petition.

Diggers Rest level crossing removal

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:44): It was sensational to join the Premier and the Minister for Transport Infrastructure on Sunday to mark the 86th level crossing removal in our state. The removal of the level crossing at the Old Calder Highway is a game changer for our local community. The brand new road bridge, Golden Way, opens tomorrow. I want to take the opportunity to thank every single worker who has played a critical role in delivering this project, as well as of course the community for their patience during construction. This project builds upon significant investment within the growing Diggers Rest community: removing level crossings, upgrading Diggers Rest Primary School and significant upgrades that have been delivered to the Diggers Rest Recreation Reserve.

Joshua Bishop

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:45): I also want to take this opportunity to continue to raise awareness of missing local man Joshua Bishop. Twenty-three years old, a member of my local community, he has not been seen since 27 May, and understandably family and loved ones are very concerned about his welfare. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Victoria Police for their work supporting agencies and of course the wider community, who are banding together, and we hope that he is found safe and well as soon as possible.

National Police Legacy Day

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:45): Today is the first ever National Police Legacy Day, and I want to particularly thank the men and women of Victoria Police for the work they do in keeping us safe and Victoria Police Legacy for what they do in supporting families that have lost a loved one from the police force. I want to particularly thank CEO Deb Robertson and all of the members of Victoria Police Legacy for the work that they do. Thank you, and remember: buy a badge and support the great work that police legacy does.

Middle East conflict

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:46): In these difficult times for Melbourne's Jewish community, I stand in unwavering support of the State of Israel as it exercises its right to self-defence, defending itself from escalating threats from the Iran terrorist regime. While Israel targets nuclear sites and military targets, Iran targets innocent civilians. We will hopefully not forget this time when Israel did the world a favour to rid Iran of nuclear weapons. Our hearts go out to our brothers and sisters in Israel and the people of Iran that have been caught up in the violence of this evil Iranian regime. Could I also say to everybody in my community: am Yisrael chai, and peace to all of you.

Maccabiah Games

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:47): Can I also just say the Maccabiah Games was meant to happen on 10 July. This will not be happening, but the theme of 'More than ever' will continue. We will fight. We will be there to support it more than ever. Sport is an act of unity and will bring people together.

Drought

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (15:47): A week ago the Minister for Agriculture asked me to visit farming communities in the south-west. I want to thank those hardworking people for their frank and at times heartbreaking accounts of the impacts of drought on them, their families and their communities. To Gorst farm supplies and to the struggling dairy farmers, young and old, of Mortlake: thank you for your heartfelt and honest opinions on how this government can support you and your communities through this drought. I worked our family farm through the millennial drought and know too well the toll that you pay as you endlessly feed out, the gnawing concern about the overdraft and the dashed hope of a failed season. We know this one is much harder. Two years have depleted even the most forward-thinking farmers' reserves, and in the words of Victorian Farmers Federation president Brett Hosking, this is not only a rain drought but also a feed drought.

I am honoured to serve on the Premier's drought taskforce, and to all those that gave me their thoughts and their time: your insights have been heard. At the second meeting we committed to streamlining freight routes so there are faster biosecurity clearances and hay from New South Wales and Queensland can reach Victorian farms quickly and safely. There are also rebates for kangaroo controls and access to around 300 emergency water supply points, and we will work to find more ways to support you. We are in this for the long haul because we value your hard work.

Kestrel Aviation

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (15:48): I recently had the privilege of attending an event celebrating 40 years of Kestrel Aviation, a local family-owned company that has grown into a global leader in aerial firefighting and emergency response. At the centre of Kestrel's story are Ray and Eleanor Cronin. Ray's innovation has transformed how we fight fires, introducing capabilities that have changed how emergency services operate. Eleanor's leadership has steered Kestrel with heart, purpose and deep community values. Their pioneering firebombing technology was developed at their Mangalore base, and behind every aircraft is a team of pilots, engineers, refuellers and admin staff, all locals living in our community.

Kestrel's impact extends far beyond the runway. Whether it is fires, floods or remote rescues, when disaster strikes they are among the first in the sky. From our farm we often hear the rotors overhead and step outside. Is it the Black Hawk, the Super Puma, maybe the LongRanger? My children stare up in awe, and it is in those moments that it is not just about aircraft, it is knowing that help is on the way.

Ivan Lister

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (15:49): This month I also spent time at the Euroa cattle sale alongside someone many farmers quietly rely on, Ivan Lister. Ivan is one of the few dedicated mental health advocates in our region, and he does not make a fuss. He is there listening and helping when people need it most. At a time when drought and financial pressures hang heavily, that quiet support means everything.

Molyullah fish and chip night

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (15:50): That same community spirit was alive at the Molyullah fish and chip night. Dams remain empty and feed prices are worrying, but those nights are not about that.

Gendered violence

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:50): Recently I had the chance to join Respect Victoria and a range of stakeholders for the launch of What Kind of Man Do You Want to Be?, a campaign in the words of 12 Victorian men around what it means to be a man in our community. We need to find creative ways to bring men into behaviour change conversations and the journey when it comes to gendered violence. This campaign is grounded in fantastic research and extensive focus grouping. It

speaks to what men and so many Victorians are telling us. It uncovers the pressures that relate to masculinities and provides space to safely explore ways that are safer for men to be themselves.

In my role I get to see this and the incredible work that is done each and every day to prevent gendered violence. I also get to hang out with some incredible legends from Jesuit Social Services, the Man Cave, Movember and the extensive network of women's health organisations, who do so much work in this space. This campaign supports their work. It is there to reinforce and provide ways for men to have conversations that safely challenge gendered roles. Challenging gendered roles and especially challenging harmful, constraining ideas about what it means to be a man in our community are an essential part of the bigger effort to prevent men's violence against women. These are essential resources that we will see across Meta, YouTube and Facebook. They plant the seed of conversations that we have to have in ending gendered violence and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of Victorian men across our community.

Kew electorate student leaders

Jess WILSON (Kew) (15:51): This month it was an absolute pleasure to host students from primary and secondary schools in Kew in my school leaders forums, held right here in this chamber. I am so excited about the ideas and perspectives our young people will bring to this state in the future. I want to share with you some of the highlights.

Gilbert from Balwyn High School highlighted the significant impact of the North East Link project on residents of North Balwyn and called for improved public engagement from project staff and noise curfews to help residents sleep at night. Samaira, also from Balwyn High, highlighted the chronic underfunding of Victorian public schools in comparison to other states in Australia. Several students, including Sam from Greythorn Primary, Jarvis from St Anne's, Abigal from Camberwell Girls, Theo from Kew High and Grace from Ruyton, raised the issue of youth mental health and the need to expand access to support services for young people. Others, including Kayla and Rose from Canterbury Girls', Grace from Kew East Primary and Freddie from Sacred Heart, raised housing affordability and youth homelessness as key concerns of theirs.

Arnold from Camberwell Grammar, Lucy from MLC, Zoe from Our Holy Redeemer, Max from Our Lady of Good Counsel, Emily from Sacred Heart, Miles from Trinity, Charlie from Camberwell Grammar, Stephanie from Fintona, Jacquie from Genazzano and Emily from Kew High all focused on public transport and road issues, highlighting the need for greater public transport infrastructure as well as improved road quality and lighting and the expansion of bike paths.

Sebastian De Spina

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:53): I have the best people in my community, and that is why today I want to pay special tribute to Sebastian De Spina, who has been recognised for 10 years volunteer service with the SES. What an absolute legend. In that time, he has been part of over 1240 requests for assistance. Over 1240 times he has turned up when others could not. He has turned up at the lowest point of somebody's life. He has been there to help. And doesn't he have a fitting surname, De Spina, because volunteers are the backbone of our community. I know that they stand ready to help and be there for my community, and so I say a very big thankyou.

Childcare services

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:54): I also want to thank the kindies and childcare centres in my electorate. Yesterday I continued visiting them to share with them information about our early parenting centres and mental health hubs. I am really keen to make sure that everyone hears about these free services that are so helpful. It really made sense yesterday when I spoke with a director, who said, 'Just yesterday we staff were talking about a mum that we didn't know how to help. We didn't know what to do. She told us how she felt,' and now this woman has somewhere to help her.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (15:54): It is time we fundamentally change how we think about housing in Victoria – not as a commodity just to be bought and sold and profited from but as a basic human right. That is why the Greens today are introducing our bill to enshrine the right to adequate housing in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, because the basic fact is every human needs somewhere to live – somewhere affordable, somewhere accessible, somewhere structurally sound and somewhere habitable. We cannot continue to prioritise the profits of private developers over people's basic needs and expect the housing crisis to improve.

Documents obtained by freedom of information reveal that this Labor government is sacrificing minimum standards to make building cheaper and more profitable for developers. But cost cutting like shrinking bedrooms and scrapping storage will leave us with unlivable homes, and the way that we live impacts on our mental health, on our employment and education prospects and on our overall happiness. This is why when we increase housing density – which we must do; we must increase supply – the government must also ensure that that supply is affordable and it is livable, otherwise it will just deepen housing inequity. The state government must listen to experts and listen to the community, not just the property developers and the lobbyists, and build for the future.

Brian Hart

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (15:56): Our community lost a truly amazing man recently. Brian Roger Hart was kind, caring and dearly loved. He was son to William and Edna, brother to Bill and Pat, husband to Jean, father to Barbara, Carole, Stephen and Anne, grandpa to Kelly and Kate and much-loved great-grandpa to Lily, Aiden and Harper. Brian met the love of his life Jean Dennis at a dance in Carisbrook back in 1954, and they were married the next year. As husband and wife for 70 years, they did so much together. They ruled the scene as part of Maryborough's Beefsteak & Burgundy Club, in which Brian served as wine master. They loved to travel the world together and attend classical music performances, especially opera, in which Jean had been trained in soprano roles.

As he was a local builder, it is hard to find a building in Maryborough that Brian did not work on. He was a master at his craft and helped countless families build their dream homes. He loved tennis, golf, fishing, tending to his vegetable garden and the Maryborough Apex Club. Brian was also a life member of the Labor Party and a passionate activist in helping refugees in Australia. He was a stalwart of our movement, welcoming and supporting generations of members and believers into the fold. As the Premier herself has said, he never lost faith in the light on the hill, and in many respects he embodied it. He will be deeply missed by our movement, our community and of course his family and friends. Vale, Brian Roger Hart.

Government performance

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (15:57): If any Victorian needed proof that Labor cannot manage money and is addicted to debt, we only need to look at the debt bomb disaster that this state is facing. The Parliament of Victoria was established in 1856, with members of Parliament being sworn in on 2 November 1856. Between 1856 and 2014 – that is 158 years – the Victorian government had accumulated $21 billion in net state debt. 2014 was the last year of a Liberal–Nationals government. Labor members would say, 'But debt increased across the budget forward estimates under our stewardship,' but once again they would be incorrect. Under the Liberal–Nationals government's last budget in 2014, net state debt was forecast to decrease to $19.5 billion over the forward estimates to 2018. The concept of reduction of debt would be foreign to all Labor members. In just a short 11 years under the current state Labor government net state debt will have exploded to $155.5 billion this fiscal year, a more than sevenfold increase, and deeply concerning, a forecast $194 billion – $172.8 billion of additional net state debt since 2014, or a more than ninefold increase – by 2028–29.

Werribee Centrals Junior Football Club

John LISTER (Werribee) (15:59): It has been a busy few weeks across the Werribee electorate. Congratulations to the Werribee Centrals Junior Football Club for their Big Freeze event. It has been quite the theme here in this Parliament the last few days. It was great to see coaches and leaders in the club take the lead in getting the ice bucket dunked over them, with the night raising over $2500 for the cause.

Wyndham Football Club

John LISTER (Werribee) (15:59): Continuing the football theme, albeit with a differently shaped ball, a soccer ball, thank you to Trevor at Wyndham Football Club for the tour of the facilities in Wyndham Vale. This government has committed to improving not only the lighting at that ground but the surface at that ground as well. This club is really important in the Wyndham Vale community not only for its support for young people who want to play soccer but also for the refugee community, who are looking for that place to bond and find those new connections in our community. I look forward to working with Wyndham City Council to deliver the upgrades as per the grant application over the coming months.

Metro Tunnel

John LISTER (Werribee) (16:00): Finally, thank you to the students from Wyndham Central College who had an exclusive tour of Parkville station. This investment gives students in my electorate a new way to university, showing how Labor invests not only in concrete and steel but also in people's opportunities. Next year Emerson, Liam, Prakriti, Christine, Eh Moe and Dah Ler will be some of the thousands of students from the western suburbs who will be able to have access to our universities in Parkville.

Heatherton Football Netball Club

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (16:00): Congratulations to Heatherton Football Netball Club on this year's budget commitment of up to $70,000 for an electronic scoreboard and new and upgraded match-day facilities, supporting players, volunteers and the wider community to enjoy local sport at its best. What a fantastic result for the club and our community. Heatherton Football Netball Club is an amazing local sporting club, an inclusive and welcoming club that brings families together throughout the year. That is why I am extremely proud of this budget investment. There are wins everywhere in the budget, which have been very well received when I am talking to residents at my mobile office, doorknocking or at community events, and that is because it is a budget and a government focused on what matters most for Victorians. Thank you again to the Heatherton Football Netball Club and to all of our local clubs for the incredible impact they have in building our thriving and inclusive community in Clarinda and across the south-east.

Keysborough Secondary College

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (16:01): Also, thank you to principal Aaron Sykes and the student leaders at Keysborough Secondary College. It is always great to visit your old school. I and the member for Mulgrave visited Heatherhill Secondary, now Keysborough Secondary College. It is a wonderful school, and it was so great to see how the school at the Banksia campus has grown. So much is happening, from amazing artwork to the VET course, which is great to see.

St Kilda Sports Club

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:02): The St Kilda Sports Club, formerly known as the St Kilda Bowling Club, is of historical significance as the second-oldest bowling club in Australia. The club has operated continuously on this site from 1865 until the present, and it was an absolute delight just a week ago – and I should say the St Kilda Bowling Club was formed at a meeting on 7 June 1865 – on 7 June of this year, to attend their 160th celebration. It was truly wonderful. They had a welcome to country from the Boonwurrung, and there was some bowling. I was able to keep the ball on the

ground for a change, which was certainly an improvement. I must say this club is very welcoming. It is a wonderful meeting place. There are so many beautiful social aspects as well as both pennant and social games, barefoot bowls and more. It is truly a wonderful club, and I wish it 160 more years of success.

Father Bob's Pantry

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:03): Also, I want to do a little shout-out for Father Bob's Pantry. I popped in there at the weekend, when they had their annual food drive. There are amazing volunteers who are working day in and day out to help. I do know they feed between 60 and 70 local people, generally, per day. This is a wonderful service. They do it from the heart. They provide quality, nutritious food, but it is also the emotional support.

Ballarat Hindu Temple & Cultural Centre

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (16:04): The Allan Labor government is proud to support the Ballarat Hindu Temple & Cultural Centre and has provided $900,000 for the development of a community centre and place of worship in Ross Creek. On Sunday I was honoured to attend the Bhoomi Pooja, an auspicious Hindu ceremony to mark the official commencement of the project, blessed by Lord Ganesha. I was honoured to be present for the Sankusthapana. The ritual marks an important milestone for our Indian community and their desire for a Hindu temple in our community.

BLOC Music Theatre

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (16:04): I was blown away by the extraordinary talent and hard work of everyone involved in BLOC Music Theatre's *Wizard of Oz*. Congratulations to director Gareth Grainger, musical director Sarah Barlow, choral director Rob Muirhead and choreographers Renee Erwin and Beth Gayon on your stellar show. Well done to Izzy Farah, who starred as Dorothy, Charlie McGinnis as Scarecrow, Rob Muirhead as Tin Man, Marcus Hovey as Lion and all the cast and crew on outstanding performances. It was so wonderful for BLOC to be back performing at Ballarat's iconic Her Majesty's Theatre following its restoration, supported by the Victorian Labor government with $10 million in funding.

Ballarat Corporate and Community Sleepout

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (16:05): It was a chilly Friday night for the Ballarat Corporate and Community Sleepout. Well done to the Central Highlands Housing Alliance for organising the inaugural event and raising awareness of homelessness in our community.

Ballarat QHub

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (16:05): I am a proud ally of our rainbow community, and in this year's budget we are funding QHub to continue support for LGBTIQA+ young people.

Period products

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (16:05): Every day we are working to make our communities more inclusive, and I am proud to share some of the recent Bellarine initiatives that are helping us get there. Three local libraries – Leopold, Drysdale and Queenscliff – have been announced as the first Bellarine locations to receive new vending machines stocked with free pads and tampons. These machines will ensure that everyone can access these essential health items with dignity wherever they need them.

Changing Places

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (16:05): Late last year the Bellarine had its first Changing Places facility open up at the Portarlington foreshore. Now a second one is under construction at the Ocean Grove main beach and due to open very soon. Changing Places are larger than the standard accessible toilets, equipped with extra features and more space to meet the needs of people with disability and

their carers. I would like to thank the Bellarine, Bayside and Barwon Coast land managers for their collaboration and investment in this important project. As coastal land managers they are committed to making our beaches more inclusive and enjoyable for everyone. In addition to the Changing Places, we have beach wheelchairs now available in Ocean Grove as well, with the Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club recently receiving funding through the state government's all abilities participation grants, supporting another wheelchair initiative. Together these initiatives represent the significant progress we are making throughout the Bellarine.

Bills

Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 10 insert –

   "(ea) to amend the **Victoria Police Act 2013** in relation to the appointment of the Chief Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioners and persons acting as Chief Commissioner of Police or a Deputy Commissioner; and".

2. Insert the following New Division after Division 3 of Part 5 –

   '**Division 4 – Amendment of Victoria Police Act 2013**

   19A Appointment of Chief Commissioner

   After section 17(1) of the **Victoria Police Act 2013 insert** –

   "(1A) The Chief Commissioner must be –

   (a) an Australian citizen; or

   (b) a permanent resident within the meaning of the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 of the Commonwealth; or

   (c) a person who has a permanent visa or is entitled to be granted a permanent visa under the Migration Act 1958 of the Commonwealth; or

   (d) a New Zealand citizen who has a special category visa or is entitled to be granted a special category visa under the Migration Act 1958 of the Commonwealth.".

   19B Appointment of Acting Chief Commissioner

   After section 18(1) of the **Victoria Police Act 2013 insert** –

   "(1A) An Acting Chief Commissioner must be –

   (a) an Australian citizen; or

   (b) a permanent resident within the meaning of the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 of the Commonwealth; or

   (c) a person who has a permanent visa or is entitled to be granted a permanent visa under the Migration Act 1958 of the Commonwealth; or

   (d) a New Zealand citizen who has a special category visa or is entitled to be granted a special category visa under the Migration Act 1958 of the Commonwealth.".

   19C Appointment of Deputy Commissioners

   After section 21(1) of the **Victoria Police Act 2013 insert** –

   "(1A) A Deputy Commissioner must be –

   (a) an Australian citizen; or

   (b) a permanent resident within the meaning of the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 of the Commonwealth; or

   (c) a person who has a permanent visa or is entitled to be granted a permanent visa under the Migration Act 1958 of the Commonwealth; or

   (d) a New Zealand citizen who has a special category visa or is entitled to be granted a special category visa under the Migration Act 1958 of the Commonwealth.".

19D Appointment of Acting Deputy Commissioner

After section 22(1) of the **Victoria Police Act 2013 insert** –

"(1A) An Acting Deputy Commissioner must be –

(a) an Australian citizen; or

(b) a permanent resident within the meaning of the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 of the Commonwealth; or

(c) a person who has a permanent visa or is entitled to be granted a permanent visa under the Migration Act 1958 of the Commonwealth; or

(d) a New Zealand citizen who has a special category visa or is entitled to be granted a special category visa under the Migration Act 1958 of the Commonwealth.".'.

3. Long title, after "**Act 2021**" insert ", the **Victoria Police Act 2013**".

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (16:07): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

In doing so I am going to make a couple of comments about them. First, I would like to start by acknowledging that today is National Police Legacy Day. It is a new but annual event to recognise the critical support Victoria Police Legacy provides to families. I think given the nature of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 and the house amendments that we are speaking to, it is an opportunity to touch on National Police Legacy Day as well, with the indulgence of members. It is a day which, tragically, has fallen in the shadow of the police shooting in Tasmania when an officer lost his life. There can be no more sobering reminder of the risk and the sacrifices that our police and, importantly, their families make every day to keep our community safe. Everyone deserves to come home safely at the end of the day, but for those who put their lives on the line for all of us every day it is a big sacrifice that families make on behalf of those who serve our community as first responders and as members of Victoria Police. Our condolences are with the officer's loved ones in Tasmania and police colleagues there.

Last year Victoria Police Legacy supported some 1300 people, including more than 100 children, with initiatives including counselling, education, career grants and other forms of practical assistance. Of course today we come together to acknowledge the service and sacrifice of our police but also their families, the ones that are left behind to safeguard the legacy of those who serve. I know the member for Caulfield will join me in expressing our gratitude for the service of police families here in Victoria. They do that to the highest standards, and they do that every day, 24/7.

The house amendment to the Victoria Police Act 2013 was introduced to avoid any potential uncertainty or doubt about the citizenship requirements that apply to the ranks of Chief Commissioner of Police and deputy commissioners. An international search for candidates was undertaken as part of the extensive recruitment process led by the Department of Justice and Community Safety to identify the very best candidates for the role of chief commissioner. My department carefully considered the requirements of the Victoria Police Act 2013 as part of the recruitment process and noted that the act is silent on citizenship requirements.

When the department became aware that an outdated legal rule, going back, I think, to about 1930 perhaps – do not quote me – could suggest possible citizenship requirements for the role of chief commissioner and deputy commissioner, we acted promptly to ensure that there was clarity and consistency with all other ranks in the police service, which already applies. I do not know whether the member for Caulfield got a bit of flak from some of his colleagues, but I do want to be very clear that at the time that I got my advice from the department on these matters – formal advice – the very next day advice was then provided to the member for Caulfield. Certainly there was no withholding or any delay, and certainly for the member for Caulfield and any of his colleagues who might have thought these matters could have been dealt with in a different way, as soon as it was made available and we had that advice, it was shared with those opposite.

What is also important I think is to again make that clear point that we are a multicultural state. We want the best people to come and work here and to be leaders in the Victoria Police. Victoria Police members serve in many police jurisdictions around the country and also overseas. Not only do we seek to get the best people, but many of the best people here have gone and made contributions in other police services, both here and internationally, and there is no change to those arrangements. But it is important that Victoria Police represents the people it serves, which is why there are so many different people from diverse backgrounds who are made for more – and I see them at the academy – who are graduating to serve our state.

The amendments have been progressed really out of an abundance of caution. It is entirely appropriate, noting the significance of the roles of chief commissioner and deputy commissioner to Victoria Police and the community more broadly. We do not want there to ever be any doubt on these matters. The authority of the chief commissioner and of deputy commissioners is very significant and wields significant powers under legislation, and we are not going to have any potential for these risks to apply or for there to be any doubt. By chance of course we already had a justice legislation matter before the Parliament, so it was also fortuitous that we could address these matters before our new chief commissioner Mike Bush begins his role on Friday 27 June – that will be Friday next week. Not only does he come through the international search and the independent process that has been put in place by the government and overseen by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, but also – and you do not have to take the government's word for it or the Parliament's word for it or the panel's word for it – you can look very clearly online and anywhere else at the very substantial body of work that Mike Bush has been engaged in and led in New Zealand and around the world, both in tragedies around terrorism and tragedies in natural disasters and the leadership role that he has played both in New Zealand but also internationally.

We know that he is someone who comes to the role with vast experience, someone who will be able to hit the ground running, but in the broader context there will be other chief commissioners in this role in the future, and it is important that we take the opportunity to address this matter. It also applies across other significant senior appointments in the Victorian public service, and that is really a matter for others to address and to deal with.

We should also take the opportunity, I think, just to reiterate for the record our $4.5 billion contribution, our investment in Victoria Police services in our budget. Again, further, there have been no changes or reductions in the police budget here. We continue to invest some $4.5 billion in the police budget. We have continued to fund and recruit some 3600 additional police since we have been in office. And we have also secured, again, a very significant pay rise for police members. That is very significant and will see them receive not only the pay rise that they deserve but one that has been voted on and backed in by Victoria Police members right across the state. That too, I think, goes again to the significant investments and contributions we have made.

I was with the members for Narre Warren South and Narre Warren North. We were checking out the multimillion-dollar redevelopment – it is almost a redevelopment, isn't it? It is a renovation, but it is as much a redevelopment at the Narre Warren police station. We were out there just last week talking to members in the temporary accommodation that they have made home while we do that significant work. It is again another demonstration of our continued investment in police services here in Victoria. I am looking forward to welcoming the new Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police and his family next Friday 27 June. I look forward to the contribution that he will make. I know that all members of this house will wish him well in what is a very challenging role, a very tough role.

Michael O'Brien interjected.

Anthony CARBINES: It is a very interesting question. I did make the point that he will need to know who he is going to support, in football parlance. The only clue I can give is that I think it might be the Wellington Hurricanes in rugby, and I got a sense that their colours are black and gold.

Michael O'Brien interjected.

Anthony CARBINES: Yes, that was my reaction, member for Malvern. I think we will have to wait and see whether anyone can have any broader influence on those matters. But I know that he is painting to the edges; he will have a very full book when he starts on Friday next week. I look forward to members of this place having the opportunity to meet the chief commissioner in his service to the organisation that he leads.

These amendments are important. These house amendments make sense. They are important to do. They just put these matters beyond doubt. That is always important when we are dealing with lawyers and others, to ensure where possible, we legislators, we lawmakers, make sure that we can address –

A member interjected.

Anthony CARBINES: I am married to one; I do not mind them at all. But I do think it is important that we put these matters beyond doubt. We have got the opportunity to do that. I appreciate the consideration of these matters in the Council, the other place, but also the opportunity for these matters to be supported here. I look forward to us getting on with supporting the new chief commissioner. I come back to one of our esteemed former chief commissioners, Mick Miller, who, in talking about police and leadership, said there are leaders who make things happen, there are leaders who let things happen and there are leaders who do not know what happened. I have got no doubt that Mike Bush will be a leader who is going to make things happen. I wish him well as he undertakes his duties next week, and I also wish these house amendments a speedy passage.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (16:17): I rise to make some comments about the amendments that are before the house. If I could just also join with the Minister for Police in acknowledging National Police Legacy Day, a very important day. This is the inaugural Police Legacy Day. Of course, Victoria Police Legacy has been doing wonderful work for about 45 years. I want to recognise Deb Robertson, the CEO, and Lex de Man, who for about eight years was very involved in Police Legacy, and prior to that, the CFA. I have had a very, very good friendship and association with Lex, and I know he is very passionate about policing and about Police Legacy. I think today is a day that we all do come together in the Parliament to recognise the men and women who put on the uniform each and every day to protect us. Unfortunately, some do not end up being able to turn up the next day for work. When a life is lost, people are left behind. For those who are left behind, Police Legacy pick up the pieces, and we say to them: thank you for the work that you do. Whether it be financial support, counselling or emotional support, that is what Police Legacy do each and every day.

When I spoke to Shane Donaldson, who dropped off some badges so we could all wear them today – this is the new purple daisy – he was very enthusiastic, as a retired police officer now working in Police Legacy, just explaining the wonderful work that they do. So thank you very much to Police Legacy. This is the first day – the first of many – and we hope that this just gets bigger and better and that they raise heaps of money for those families that have lost a loved one.

Now on to the bill, and unfortunately, I cannot be as polite. The police minister spoke about a great former commissioner, Mick Miller, who mentioned leadership and those who make things happen and those who do not know what happened. Well, I think this government absolutely do not know what happened when it comes to this bill, because they were all very excited making a job offer to a new police commissioner but did not do their homework to work out whether they could actually employ him. So here you have a situation of a government that again has stuffed up the basic deal of putting a job offer together.

How is this new commissioner meant to be welcomed into Victoria, only to almost have his bags packed and be sent back on a plane because he cannot do the job? I mean, can you believe it? What a joke that this government at the 11th hour, literally 10 days before the police commissioner is about to turn up to do his work, all of a sudden says, 'Well, hang on a minute. We actually can't employ you to do the work, so just hold fire in New Zealand for a minute. We'll just pass an amendment to the

legislation, and we'll ensure that we clean up our stuff-up.' That is what this government does. Everything that this government touches turns absolutely to shit. That is what it does.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): The member for Caulfield will use parliamentary language, with specific regard to who is listening.

David SOUTHWICK: It is very, very hard to escape from the truth. It is quite emotional when I speak to Victorians that know just how badly this government has done in keeping Victorians safe – a prime job that this government should be doing – and how they have completely made a mess of it. Victorians are worse off because of it. We hope and pray that this new commissioner comes in – and I look forward to welcoming the police commissioner – and that this government gives him all the powers, all the support, all the resources to clean up the crime crisis that this government has created. Make no mistake that this government has created that.

Now they are running around putting press releases out: 'Look at this; we're going to ban machetes', 'Look at this, we're going to strengthen our bail laws', 'Look at this; we're going to get rid of these illegal tobacco shops that are wandering around doing things', 'Look at this today – those people that post and boast about what they are doing in terms of their crimes, we are going to stamp that out.' Even on that they are last to the party – the last state to have post-and-boast laws. This government is crawling; it is the last in the country. There are no last medals. This government wants a last ribbon, a participation prize. That is what you want, a participation prize. Well, there is no participation prize when it comes to dealing with a crime crisis. We do not want to come last; we want to be first. And everybody deserves the right to be safe – everybody. No matter what electorate you live in, everybody deserves the right to feel safe, and they do not. We are seeing it every single time.

So I look forward to welcoming the commissioner when he comes here. But unfortunately this government has not started too well. They have got his job offer wrong to start with. That is the first mistake they made. Then when he comes here, it is $50 million short on the budget. So they have said, 'You know what, take the job, but we're going to have to shave some of your budget, so you have not quite got the cash that you thought you had. And when it comes to the police, you're 1100 police short, and on top of that you've got 700 police on WorkCover, and on top of that you've got another 300 police, the most experienced, senior police, that are about to retire because of the enterprise bargaining agreement that this government again messed up.' Many of those people, the most senior staff of Victoria Police, are going to take an early retirement and leave us even more short – 2100 police short

Then we asked the acting commissioner – we are now getting up to number four in four months; this is a revolving door of commissioners. I hope that our police commissioner Mike Bush stays a lot longer than this, but this government has got a very, very poor record when it comes to looking after their members and supporting their staff – a shocking record. But let us see what happens here. Let us see how they look after and treat their members. They do not treat anybody well, this government. But again, here is somebody lacking the resources and lacking the staff. We asked the acting commissioner Bob Hill at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the other day when the police force will be at full strength in a crime crisis. Now, what do you reckon: will it be in six months, in 12 months? Victorians will have to wait five years before we have got enough police on the streets to protect us. And then we wonder about a crime crisis. This government puts out press release after press release about all of the wonderful stuff it is going to do – wonderful, wonderful things. 'We're going to do all this stuff.'

Who is going to do the work? Give all the powers in the world to Victoria Police. If you have not got them to do the work, then I tell you what, it does not make a difference. You have got to have police to do the work. You cannot have the situation where the other day you had to close half-a-dozen police stations to be able to be at the protest at the soccer – just close them, on top of the 43 police stations that have been closed. We have part-time police stations. The answer at the moment is, 'You know

what, they're not as important, because when police are out on the streets, that's more important. We've got to prioritise policing.'

I was at a forum in Sunshine the other day with Victoria Police, and many of the constituents in Sunshine and St Albans, around that area in the west, where I attended – many of the Labor meant-to-be stronghold seats, which will not be anymore, because the west have been completely neglected – stood up and said, 'Where are we going to get police? When we call them, they don't turn up.' Our hardworking stressed-out members of Victoria Police had to say, 'We do the best we can do. We prioritise the jobs. When we close the station, we have to close it because it's more important to be on the street.' I get that, but why should there be that choice? To be told, 'You know what, if there's a police station closed here, you can go 7 or 10 kilometres up the road for another one' – well, great. In the middle of a time when you need a police officer the most, drive 10 kilometres up the road – that is simply not good enough. Here is a government that has failed when it comes to policing. Here is a government that has failed when it comes to community safety.

In the last sitting week of Parliament, on the Thursday night at about 6 pm I got a call from the police minister to say, 'You got a tick? I just want to run something past you.' 'Sure, no problem.' And I did. I had a lovely cup of coffee up in the Parliament only to be told, 'You know what, we're bringing in an amendment to ensure that we can employ the new commissioner.' I said, 'Okay. Right. So when are we going to do that – next sitting week? The sitting week after?' 'No, we're going to do it tomorrow.' That was 6 pm, and this was going to be brought in the very next morning. The police minister today said that is when he found out, and I take him at his word. But what is happening with this government? The government have got more support staff than they could ever want, a bigger public service than they could ever want. Why is it taking until literally after Parliament had already risen in the last sitting to say, 'We're bringing in a change the next day to ensure this commissioner can be employed by the time he gets here.' Then we had to rush out the very next day. We had the Council meeting at 6 pm that night. At 9 o'clock the following morning we were rushing in stuff after we had employed the guy. We did not actually have the ability to employ him – and then off you go.

James Newbury interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: As the member for Brighton says, there is a phone call: 'Commissioner-elect Mike Bush, don't pack your bags yet. Just wait a minute. We haven't quite got the organisation. We need the legals to get hold of this. Just wait a minute. We'll let you know when you can board the plane.' Fair dinkum, what a hopeless government you are. What a hopeless lot you are, sitting there laughing, smiling. I would not be smiling at this. I would be embarrassed. You are all a joke. Every single one of you is a joke. That is what you are; you are a joke.

Jackson Taylor interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: As a former member of Parliament, sorry – you will be a former member of Parliament. But as a former police officer you should be embarrassed about what is going on. Our hardworking men and women of Victoria Police are under-resourced. They are rushing out, trying to deal with crimes without the resources. They are overworked. You have got thousands of them having to be deployed to things like protests and everything else. Again, they are doing that on extra shifts. This is a very, very difficult time for Victoria Police.

I really, really hope that the new commissioner can fix things to get back to grassroots policing and have police there when you need them. I know every single Victorian wants to be able to pick up the phone, make the call and have the police there when they need them. At 53 per cent, the confidence level in Victoria Police is at an all-time low. It is not Victoria Police's fault, it is this lot – it is the Allan Labor government's fault. They have neglected policing, they have cut resourcing and they have made a $50 million cut in the budget in a crime crisis. That is a joke. That is an embarrassment. This government should be ashamed of themselves. This government should be embarrassed at the way

that they have turned their backs on Victoria Police and, more importantly, turned their backs on all Victorians.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:31): There were a few mixed messages in there. I am not sure if they are for post and boast or against it, for the machete ban or against it or for stronger bail laws or against them. Strictly speaking, these are targeted amendments to the Victoria Police Act 2013, and I will speak to that in a moment. I might just remind the chamber, for the benefit of those opposite, since coming into government we have made record investments of more than $4.5 billion in Victoria Police to deliver Victorians the modern world-class policing service they deserve. This includes additional police and new and upgraded stations right across the state – there is one in South Melbourne, I should say, in my electorate, being built as we speak; I know that the police at South Melbourne police station cannot wait to see the new police station delivered and it is progressing really well – and investment in new technology to ensure that Victoria Police continue to be a modern fit-for-purpose organisation into the future. There have been more than 3600 additional police funded by our government since 2014. That is just to put a bit of perspective on some of the comments that were made by those opposite.

Coming back to the purpose of the amendments that are before the house, they are targeted amendments that will, out of an abundance of caution, ensure that there can be no question of the citizenship requirements of people appointed to the ranks of Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police and deputy commissioner of Victoria Police. I would hate to think that some of the comments made by those opposite would in any way vitiate from the determination of the merits of the chief commissioner that has been appointed. It was just a little bit of a confusing argument. But in any case, as part of the appointment process of the new chief commissioner, the Victorian government has identified an outdated legal rule. Do we leave the rule with the outdated premise, or do we update it? We are updating it. I would think that to be the right and proper thing to do, and I do not think that it deserves the characterisation that those opposite have sought to take. That suggests there may be citizenship requirements for the holder of the office of chief commissioner. This rule is unfair, and it is not right.

The Victoria Police Act 2013, which is the act which governs appointments to these roles, is currently silent on citizenship requirements. So these amendments will put that beyond doubt by making it clear and explicit that Australian citizens, permanent residents, permanent visa holders and special category visa holders – aka New Zealanders – can be appointed to the ranks of chief commissioner and deputy commissioner. The amendments provide for consistency in these requirements with those that are currently specified for the roles of assistant commissioners and below. We are a proud multicultural community, and we want the best people to come and work here regardless of where they come from. So these amendments will ensure this, and I hope that those opposite will come on the journey and be positive in its outcome instead of casting the strong aspersions they have over an amendment to an outdated rule.

Victoria Police we know is a large and complex organisation. There are more than 20,000 employees and, I reiterate, a budget of $4.5 billion. They play a critical role in serving the Victorian community and of course keeping us all safe, so it is essential that the organisation is led by persons of the highest calibre and with the most relevant and extensive experience.

Another thing to be factored in here, thinking about where we are right now and given the global nature of modern policing and contemporary approaches to appointments of this nature, is that the Victorian government should not be constrained by a requirement that only Australian citizens can be appointed to the roles of chief commissioner and deputy commissioner, provided those persons, in effect, have a right to work in Australia.

Mr Bush's appointment follows an extensive recruitment process that spanned local, interstate and international police organisations to ensure we got the right person for the job. I would like to affirm to the chamber, to give confidence – we have confidence on this side but to those opposite as well –

that Mr Bush has more than 40 years of operational and strategic police experience under his belt, including six years as commissioner and chief executive of New Zealand Police. During his time leading New Zealand Police, Mr Bush oversaw a significant transformation which saw more public trust and confidence in police, lower crime rates, a bigger focus on early intervention and a better staff culture. He also helped New Zealanders through disasters and times of immense trauma, including the Christchurch terror attack, the Whakaari / White Island eruption and COVID-19. The recruitment process for senior leadership roles in Victoria Police is a merit-based process to bring the highest quality leadership to Victoria Police, regardless of whether it is a local or an international candidate. Mr Bush's integrity in performing his role as New Zealand chief commissioner indicates that any future recruitment to senior leadership roles in Victoria Police will be merit based and that the most suitable candidates will be appointed.

Our Allan Labor government is proud of our record of working with Victoria Police to deliver them the resources and tools they need to keep our community safe, including stronger laws. On this side of the house we know that every day, in any weather and at any hour our Victoria Police officers are out patrolling the front line, often putting themselves at risk. I know that probably goes without saying, but I do not think it hurts to speak to that, because we know the sacrifices they make every day on our behalf, and I truly respect their bravery and skill. On that note, I would like to thank every Victoria Police member for their service to the community and also echo the sentiments of the Minister for Police and the shadow minister with regard to national legacy day today.

We also know that these police members deserve to be led by the best person for the job, regardless of their country of birth, and this amendment puts that beyond doubt. Some of the aspersions that have been cast by those opposite are unfortunate, I think, when we are really about making sure on the one hand that we can have the right person for the job but also update an outdated law, without them having to have a massive tantrum and performance over what is really a logical and timely legislative change.

I should say, when we are looking at how we are backing in Victoria Police, we have expanded Victoria Police's knife search powers, making it easier for police to stop, search and seize weapons. We have also invested in new equipment for our police, including $214 million to roll out tasers to all frontline police officers and PSOs, ensuring they have another nonlethal tool at their disposal to respond to potential violent offenders. We have also invested almost $1 billion to deliver new and upgraded police stations, which I mentioned earlier, across our state, and our government will continue to invest in critical police infrastructure. We have also invested more than $40 million in funding to the youth crime prevention program, which provides essential wraparound support and social engagement to at-risk young people. We know that that investment works, with an evaluation showing that completing the program has driven a 29 per cent reduction in offending for participants and a significant reduction in the severity of offending when it does occur. We certainly can see the merit in backing in the youth crime prevention program.

Through our crime prevention programs we have invested more than $100 million in over 948 initiatives since forming government, because our government understands that the best way to keep people out of the criminal justice system is to prevent them coming into contact with it wherever possible. It is really fundamentally about keeping our community safe. In any case, I will say that I hope those opposite will come on the journey with this important legislative amendment to what is an outdated legal rule. I do not think it deserves the flourish and fanfare that have been projected into the chamber to this moment when in fact we are seeking to appoint the office of next chief commissioner.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (16:41): Good luck to Mike Bush is what we say on this side. He is going to need it. He is going to need it because Victoria is currently in the grip of a youth crime crisis, not because of the neglect of this government but because of active decisions that have been made by this government – active decisions to weaken bail laws which they still have not reversed. Victoria's bail laws are still weaker today than they were 14 months ago, when the Labor government weakened them, and when the crime statistics come out on Thursday I can only imagine what story they are going to show. For all the Premier's boasting and the Attorney-General's boasting and disingenuously

claiming that Victoria now has the toughest bail laws in the country, we will see the consequence, because they are not tough, they are weak. In fact they are so weak that the upper house would not even agree to calling them tough bail laws. So we say good luck and godspeed to Mike Bush.

I do not know Mr Bush. He does come with I think a very good pedigree from his service in New Zealand. I note that he was appointed initially by the Nationals government in that country, and then he was reappointed for a subsequent term by a Labor government. So he would seem to be a person who has enjoyed bipartisan support in New Zealand. We certainly hope that he can enjoy similar support when he assumes the position of Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police on 27 June.

I certainly hope that we will not be seeing a repeat of the little theatrical performance with former chief commissioner Simon Overland when the then Premier of the day Mr Brumby and the then police minister of the day Mr Cameron went and put the chief commissioner's epaulets on his uniform for the cameras. They did everything but say, 'This is our boy. This is our appointment. He's one of ours'. From that day going forward Simon Overland lost a lot of credibility in the Victorian community, and I hope to goodness this government will finally realise that was an outrageous piece of politicking on their part and they will never, ever again put a senior police officer in the position of having to be rolled out like a prop, like a stunt, to try and boost the Labor Party's pathetic law and order credentials, because that was embarrassing to Overland and it was actually embarrassing to Premier Brumby and Minister Cameron if they did but know it.

Of course Mr Overland did not cover himself in glory in aspects of his performance in that role. We note the government has been very quick to make sure that all the Lawyer X matters have been swept under the carpet. There have been no charges brought against any of the police involved in the Lawyer X scandal, despite the fact that Mr Overland was very involved in it at the time. We also note of course that the statistics that were released by Commissioner Overland in the lead-up to the 2010 election were rubbery, to say the least – misused by James Merlino, who was then the Minister for Police, to deliberately try and mislead Victorians in the lead-up to an election to basically tell untruths about the state of crime in Victoria. That was what led to the establishment by the former Liberal government of the independent Crime Statistics Agency, because never again should Victorians be subject to crime stats being rorted, being lied about and being misused and abused for political purposes. So we need to make sure we do not go back to those dark days.

I am sure the kids from Terang College have learned some things that they possibly did not think they were going to learn about when they arrived in the Parliament today. But one of the most important things that the member for Caulfield pointed out was the state of personnel in VicPol at the moment – the fact that we are 1100 police short to fulfil the rosters, the fact that we have 700 police out on WorkCover and the fact that we have 300 police expected to head for the exit doors when the current benefits package expires, meaning we have got a shortfall of, what, 2100 in Victoria Police. The job of the government is to make sure those rosters are filled. What is the government doing? How has it let this situation evolve where we have 2100 fewer police in Victoria than we need to keep the community safe?

A member interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: It is going to take five years? Well, my community cannot wait five years. The good people of the Malvern electorate have seen a 64.5 per cent increase in aggravated burglaries in the last 12 months alone. That is not one or two – a 64.5 per cent increase in aggravated burglaries. Can you imagine what it does to your sense of confidence, your sense of security in your own home, to be broken into with somebody in your house in the middle of the night, often wielding a machete or wielding a baseball bat? It used to be that burglars would try and break into your home when you were not there because they wanted to steal your TV and they wanted to steal your video and they did not want to be detected. Now because they are after your motor car they need you to be home to have the keys. That is why we are seeing this brazen behaviour, a massive increase in aggravated burglaries,

and the government has completely dropped the ball. A 64.5 per cent increase in aggravated burglaries in my electorate and a 71.9 per cent increase in car theft – they go hand in hand.

What has the government done in relation to my Malvern police station, the one that used to be open 24 hours a day and has been open 24 hours a day for years and years and years? Well, it is now closed 16 hours a day. It is open between the hours of 10 am and 6 pm, which is fabulous if you are an aggravated burglar who works business hours, but they do not tend to do that. They do not tend to work the same business hours that you and I do. They do not tend to just work between 10 am and 6 pm. So bad luck to the people of my electorate when the aggravated burglaries happen outside those hours, because it is going to take much longer to get a response. Bad luck to the woman fleeing family violence who wants to go to a place of safety and turns up to the local police station, only to literally see a sign blocking the door saying, 'This station is closed. You can go to Prahran if you really want to speak to somebody.' That offers nobody any safety, nobody any security.

This government has dropped the ball on police resources. We heard the government claim they have increased police resources. Why is there a $50 million cut in the budget this year? In the middle of a crime crisis, with fewer police than we need, you do not cut the budget – unless you are this Labor government. This is what Mr Bush is going to face when those epaulets are put on his jacket – hopefully by himself, not by the Premier and the Minister for Police. We wish him well. He needs support, he needs resources, he needs troops to keep communities safe, he needs strong bail laws and he needs strong sentencing laws. He is not getting any of those so far. This government has got until 27 June to change its position, start backing Victoria Police and do the right things by Victorians who just want to live in safety.

Motion agreed to.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

> That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:49): I rise to speak on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. At its core what this bill should be about is enhancing financial integrity in Victoria, because that is what this state desperately needs. We need to see the rules around financial integrity enhanced. Sadly, this bill is a lost opportunity to enhance that integrity. In fact what has been exposed is a bill that sneakily undermines truthfulness in financial reporting and sidesteps proper accountability when it comes to financial integrity in this state, and what a shame.

For background, the issue around financial integrity and enhancing financial integrity rules has been a chequered one over recent years, not only in this Parliament but in two parliaments prior. Two parliaments prior, a bill was introduced into this place which had some mechanisms contained within it that would, in theory, increase financial integrity measures. At that time there was not an agreement by this Parliament to proceed with that bill, and so the bill did not move through the chambers, because I think there was a recognition even at that time that what the government was trying to do then was obfuscate truthfulness in budget reporting. We saw in that particular bill a number of the contentious measures, not all of the contentious measures but some of the contentious measures, that are contained in the bill.

I might take a moment to talk about the comparison between the bill then and the bill now in terms of the measures contained therein. One of the most contentious, which is in both bills – the draft bill then and the bill now – is the removal of warrants. In shorthand, a process exists, which the government now try to publicly mock because they are trying to justify the reason for removing this important

accountability mechanism, whereby the Governor effectively signs off on government spending. What the government will say is: when these mechanisms were put in place, money was physical, and so therefore there was a need to account for expenditure. Well, as we now know, has there ever been a time in history where the amount a government spends needs to be accounted for more than is the case now? We heard the member for Rowville speak earlier today about the amount of debt that was chalked up over the 158 years of this place until 2014 being minuscule by comparison to the debt that has been chalked up under this government.

The warrant mechanism is a mechanism that allows the Governor a signing right, effectively, for the money that the government is spending, the appropriation of this government. That the government wants to remove that should not, frankly, surprise anybody. I think that the government would of course want to remove that oversight. But that was a common provision, and I suspect it was a contentious issue in 2017 when the forebear of this particular bill was introduced and one of the reasons why the Parliament said it was a bridge too far. We know that it is a core part of the current bill and one that we completely and wholeheartedly oppose.

Why should we have the Governor sign off on bills that go through both chambers of this place? You could make the same argument. It would be a false argument, but you could. Only a government that spends too much money and does not want people to know about it could possibly argue that that requirement of oversight is unnecessary. Only a government that does not see an accountability need to watch their own spending, because they have forgotten that the money they spend is first earned by a taxpayer, could argue for the removal of that process. We will hear government speaker after government speaker say, 'Well, times have changed, money's not physical. Things have changed, and so therefore we don't need that accountability measure anymore.' Has there ever been a time in history where that has been needed more? I can assure you there has not. So we wholeheartedly oppose the government's proposal to remove that accountability measure.

The original bill in 2017 did have clearer ministerial directions in relation to compliance obligations, and as a measure in the current bill we understand that. We understand that there are some measures within the bill that effectively move it from ministerial guidance to legislative requirements in relation to financial management, and that makes sense. It is important to put on record that those changes which were contained in the original bill of 2017 do make sense, as do certain financial management obligations in relation to public bodies and departments that were also included in that bill. Those measures were really the core part of the original bill.

Post that bill failing the department conducted a review into financial management obligations as they exist through this act, and what we found out through the process of this particular bill is that that review has never been completed, so we have a bill that is before this chamber based on a review that has not been completed. The department, after failing on their first bill two terms ago, conducted a review, and the review has never been completed. The review was an internal review that only consulted other departments – of course it did. I mean, why would you talk to anybody in the financial markets? Because they would tell you what they really think. There was, as the government said, no consultation outside the departments. The government admitted that. They admitted that when it came to rules around financial obligation there was no external consultation as part of that review. That is what the department said in the bill briefing. We can only take them at their word. But the review that was undertaken, the department also confirmed, was not completed. So what is this bill? This bill is based on a review that has not been completed and a review that has not seen the light of day. I am not aware that, other than the officers that dealt with the draft review, anybody else has seen it. So that is the guts of what has supposedly led to this new updated bill.

What is new in this bill? There are some notable key differences, and some of them are meritorious. I do note a new, effective budget overrun process. Currently, where a budget overrun is likely, there is no official process other than guidance that notification needs to be made in relation to that overrun. It makes sense to legislate that, so I do put on record our view that that additional measure, which was not included in the original bill, is noteworthy.

You can argue that the warrant removal was, at the time of the original bill, the worst thing in the bill. Well, I think now there is a new measure that pips it. This new bill seeks to remove quarterly reporting in the final quarter after an election. The department says, 'It's all too hard after a pre-election update to then complete an update post the election before the end of the year.' It is all too hard. At face value you might say, yes, a department would say it is hard because it is extra work, though the department is in caretaker and so they have nothing else to do. They are literally in caretaker. I see the department staff laughing, but they are in caretaker and so there is less work. By its own definition, there is less work. So initially you might take it at face value that they think it is all too hard, but we are talking about the disclosure of taxpayer money. This is the problem with this government. They misunderstand that there is a requirement and an obligation to account for the way they spend other people's money. It is not their money, it is other people's money. In an election year what this bill proposes to do is remove the requirement for that report. It removes it entirely, so there will be less financial reporting in an election year, full stop. There will be less under this government.

How you can put a bill forward to this place saying you are going to improve financial management but report less is deeply, deeply concerning. Frankly it is sneaky. How can you propose to remove requirements to report under a bill that by its definition should be seeking to enhance the way finances are reported? It cuts against the very grain of what this bill proposes to do. It should concern every Victorian that the two core measures of this bill – and I did note there are other measures that are meritorious – reduce the requirement for financial reporting in a major way, because if you are removing the requirement for a quarterly report then by its own very definition you are removing the current requirement that exists in a bill that shamelessly proposes, in name only, to enhance financial management in this state. Only this Labor government could do it.

What this bill should be called is the 'scrapping financial reporting requirements bill'. That is what this bill should be called, the 'scrapping financial reporting requirements bill', because that truthfully would explain what this bill is all about – reducing the number of financial reports. As I said earlier, when we went through the briefing process the department spoke about it being difficult to produce these reports because of the tight turnaround. What the department also said is it is difficult for an incoming government, because if there is a change in government the new Treasurer will have a short timeline after an election to approve a report. So the first thing I said was, 'Well, there have been three occasions where that has occurred.' The department only had record of one. I spoke to the Treasurer at the time, who dealt with it a second time. The department only had a record of one of the three, but anyway I was able to find record of the other, and on both occasions it was accepted that there was no issue. So the department acknowledged in the one instance they were aware of that the Treasurer dealt with the issue without any problem. I spoke to the Treasurer at the time, the member for Rowville, who said he also had no problem managing that timeline and the reporting process. So what is the problem that they are trying to solve with this scrapping of a financial reporting requirement? What is the problem that the government is trying to resolve?

We had a conversation in the bill briefing about policy and politics, and this change is actually more about politics than it is about policy. If the department had said simply, 'It's hard doing work when we're in caretaker period,' I am sure that any government would say, 'Well, come on, you've been doing it for how many decades? In the three instances that we are aware of there's never been an issue, so just deal with it.' But what we do know is that the government want to reduce their requirement for financial reporting, and that is what, at its core, this amendment is about. The bill should be called the 'scrapping financial reporting requirements bill' because that is truthfully what it is, and the second amendment removes the Governor's oversight of appropriations.

You have a bill that does a number of – I will not say minor things, but certainly in terms of financial management they improve financial obligations, and we concede that. We concede that when it comes to reporting of overruns and Treasury's legislated right to ensure that changes in departments are made with Treasury's awareness, they are fair and reasonable. Also, there are certain declarations in relation to very, very small entities – for example, cemetery trusts. Where those changes occur with those

entities, they can be exempt from a traditional form of financial reporting, and that makes sense. In a very small number of circumstances where entities have effectively no budget, these obligations – more broadly on notification processes and also exemptions – and these changes make sense. But what does not make sense is what is actually at the core of this bill. At the core of this bill are two very big, sneaky things that the government is trying to hide under a bill that is supposedly about enhancing financial management.

The coalition will not support these changes, which are trying to hide how the Labor government spends taxpayers money. Only a Labor government could come into this chamber under the guise of improving financial management and hide the way that Victorian taxpayers money is spent, and that is the truth of this bill. This bill is a very, very sneaky bill, and it was called out today in the media for what it is – a very, very sneaky bill. You can see that a number of people, including experts, have made it very clear that there should be the reporting regime that exists now into the future, which is our position too.

The economist Saul Eslake spoke about the crucial need for the quarterly report that the government is proposing to scrap to remain because of the crucial differences between a pre-election budget update and a quarterly update thereafter. There are going to be differences, and just removing the requirement is simply wrong in principle, and it also undermines the financial reporting regime that exists.

There were some additions, as I spoke to earlier, that were worthy and meritorious, but one does wonder why this government, when looking at the previous bill and adding to what was originally put in 2017, decided, for purely political reasons, to remove a quarterly reporting requirement. Why would you do that? Why would any Treasurer, and especially this new Treasurer, think that is a good idea? You might not it understand fully, but you could see with the former Treasurer, who had been there for a decade and clearly was an expert in covering up his own mess, why he would personally want to reduce reporting requirements. Of course he would want to reduce the reporting regime in the state. But for a new Treasurer to tick off this bill to come into this place – I mean, what a shocking record.

Katie Hall: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member for Brighton is speaking a lot about Treasury. I note that this is actually a finance bill, and I am not quite sure why the member for Evelyn is not leading this contribution from the opposition. I wonder whether the member for Brighton has pulled rank. But if he could get back to the finance aspect.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): That is not a point of order.

James NEWBURY: I did not even know that member was still in this chamber. I am speaking directly to the reporting regime that the government in this bill is trying to scrap. You can completely understand why this government are getting so anxious about that being exposed, because they were hoping this one would sneak through and that no-one would notice the reduction in the reporting requirements. That is why we have as a coalition put forward such a strong plan in relation to enhancing financial reporting in this state, which we have spoken about over recent weeks – because we believe that the future of this state is about growing this state, and at the core of that is ensuring that the market and the broader economy have trust in what the government is doing and what the government is reporting. We have seen time and time again the credit rating agencies especially saying, 'We don't trust what the government is saying.' That is why they put this state on notice in terms of the credit rating. I mean, what a bad rating we have. But they put us on notice.

As my colleagues are rightly pointing out, we know the Treasurer has just been in New York begging to keep the current credit rating – begging on the taxpayer's dollar, no less. It will be very interesting to see because I am not quite sure how those rating agency meetings will have gone with a Treasurer who has literally no plan to fix the problem that this government has created. When you talk about the biggest project in this state's history and the budget line item is 'TBC', you must walk in and think that you are a joke. Well, you are as Treasurer. 'How much is this going to cost?' 'TBC. Don't know.'

When the federal government ask how much it is going to cost, they will not even tell them. So the credit rating agencies of course are saying, 'Hang on, your budget mechanisms aren't transparent, and they don't make sense.' They have said that over and over again, not only putting our ratings on warning but also putting our infrastructure spends and the lack of proper oversight on our infrastructure spends on the record. They have said it. For rating agencies to be saying that over and over and over and over again, including after the budget, should tell you everything you need to know. They have also spoken about this giant ticking debt bomb that this state now is sitting on because of this government.

What the coalition has identified is a crucial need to enhance truthfulness, honesty and transparency in the way the budget is reported but also how spending decisions are made, what things will cost and when they will be delivered. To think that in the first 10 years of this government, between what they promised to spend and what they did spend, there was a $129 billion blowout – $129 billion between what the budget said and the budget actual. How can you make a mistake like that unless you are being deliberately deceptive? The average was $14 billion a year between what was promised and what was spent, so is there any wonder that there have been calls for truthfulness, honesty and enhanced financial reporting. And what have we seen instead – we have seen a bill come into this chamber which does, as I acknowledged, make a number of minor, I would say, technical changes in relation to notifications and reporting which, if they were in a bill in and of themselves, I would suggest we would be supportive of. But what this bill does is try to cover two really, really sneaky changes with these other amendments. We know when it comes to the Governor's effective signing off, for want of a better phrase, of the government's appropriations – scrapped if this bill is passed. The Governor's oversight of spend – gone. Why would this government want anybody to watch what they spend? But also then there is the reporting of what is being spent through a quarterly reporting process.

It does not matter what those on the other side say to try and explain how times have changed, there is not a need, departments are busy and all that rubbish. It is all rubbish. The truth is, because of those two measures at the core of this bill, our financial management obligations in this state are being reduced. The truth is that is what this bill is about – scrapping those. We cannot support those, and I think that it should be seen for what it is. It will be seen for what it is. It is deeply concerning to think that we have a new Treasurer who has ticked off on this bill and is trying to sneakily hide what this government is spending and reduce the amount of oversight of that spending. This is not the government's money, it is taxpayers money, and this Labor Party has well and truly forgotten that.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (17:19): It is an absolute pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. At the outset can I say that this bill –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: It is a finance bill, absolutely, and I expect to hear members on the other side speak very, very passionately about this. I do find myself a little bit confused about what the opposition member that just spoke was talking about. This bill proposes to ensure that departments and public bodies are using resources in a fiscally sustainable way – something I think we can all agree on – and having regard to decisions of government and to proper financial management. It also intends to make sure that the Financial Management Act 1994 and the financial framework of the state are fit for purpose, that the public sector is resilient to future challenges and also that the Victorian public sector financial management legislative framework complements and supports administrative reforms to manage fiscal risk, drive better financial discipline within departments and public bodies, increase central oversight and management and increase financial management capability and accountability. So I do find myself very, very confused that those opposite will not be supporting this bill.

We have heard from the member for Brighton, who seems to have two settings: outrage and confusion. I think we heard them both at level 100 just then. I do not want to be rude, but it was the economic insight of a toaster right there. A lot of what the member said did not make sense, and I think we are confusing confidence with competence. You can stand up in this place and act very confident, but it

does not mean anything you say actually makes sense. I would say the loudest critics of reform like this are sometimes those who liked the old system because they could slip something through it. The member for Brighton said that we are hiding the books. Mate, there is a budget online. There are budget books given out on budget day. There is the mid-year update. You can go and – if you need to, like your speech – contact ChatGPT and bring it up. It is there. I think every time the shadow minister opens his mouth about finances or the economy an economist somewhere dies a little bit in their heart and a fairy loses its wings. If you cannot find the figures from this government, I cannot help you. I think that that was a very, very confusing and a very, very confused contribution to this house. The member for Brighton warning people in this house about financial transparency is a little bit like Colonel Sanders giving a TED Talk on chicken welfare. It just does not make sense.

We heard something – which I will bring up in a second – that the member raised, which was why we do not consult with financial markets when we are making financial legislation. I want you just for the next couple of minutes to think about that one, and I will get back to it in a minute. Why does this legislature and government not consult with financial markets, whether it be the forex or stocks or bonds? I am not sure the member knows what he is talking about.

The member for Brighton has been in the paper recently, saying this bill hides the government's pre-election spending. Well, in the bill there are requirements for pre-election updates, quarterly reporting and risk flagging. It beggars belief that he can even come into this chamber and say that. I know he has had the good graces of the departmental staffers giving him information. Whether he chooses to educate himself and absorb that information is up to him, but it is there for him to read.

The current process for the Governor signing a warrant is so outdated that when it was written people still rode horses and Ned Kelly was still riding around. It is that old. The member for Brighton also said that we are removing crucial safeguards. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are actually removing a paperwork regime that is older than Vegemite itself. Times have changed, and we need to modernise. The warrant system is so outdated that they probably sent those warrants by pigeon. We do not do that anymore. There is this thing called email; there is the internet. We use it and we use it well, and we can update our record keeping without being accused of a lack of transparency and clarity in our numbers.

I also notice in the *Herald Sun* that the shadow minister accused the government of changing the rules to avoid scrutiny. We are not trying to avoid scrutiny; we are updating a budget system that predates sliced bread, this thing is so old. If the member for Brighton had his way, we would still be in here with powdered wigs, balancing the books on a chalkboard. This is just modernising the system.

The whole thing about us stopping the Governor signing things off is also something that I think warrants some discussion. It is not like the Governor sits there with a ledger and signs off everything that is bought from Officeworks by a department. It is a ceremonial signature. It is almost seen as the last line of defence between fiscal responsibility and not having it; it is something that is ceremonial. Next I think the members opposite will be demanding royal seals and swords and knights to be in here so we can order photocopy toner. We do not have to work like that these days. We can be more efficient. Get on board; be in the 21st century with us.

The accusation of secrecy is also a really interesting one. It is a good segue into that question I asked just before about who we should be consulting on this legislation. Look, if the member thinks that this bill is secretive, he must think that the budget papers are classified files and X files. It is just a stupid argument. I think those economic arguments we just heard were delivered with the confidence of a man who has never actually been fact checked but really should be, because as we stand here today, we have got people opposite giving us lectures on transparency while some of their members are clocking up claim forms like they are rockstars. I really think there needs to be a little bit of transparency on that side to see what is going on there.

Going back to why we do not consult financial markets when we make our legislation, the first reason would obviously be that financial markets do not run this state, the Victorian government does; the Parliament as a whole does. We are accountable to the people of Victoria, not to investors, bankers or hedge funds. The second reason would be that I do not think public policy should be market tested on the forex or on the ASX. I have a real problem with that. I have a huge problem with that, and I do not think the member opposite really considered what he was talking about when he said 'financial markets'. Maybe he meant something else, but financial markets mean stocks, bonds, derivatives, forex. They are the main parts of the financial market, and it revolves around them. Is this what the member is saying: that the financial elites should be brought in to be briefed on our legislation and be consulted on it and offer their changes before the Victorian public?

This is not about making people money. This is not about the private sector. This is not about stocks and bonds. This is about governing Victoria, and we should be able to bring a bill into this house that provides all the clarity and to update that transparency so that Victorians know how every dollar is being spent, and that is what this bill does. I cannot for the life of me understand how a shadow minister can rise in this place and actually ask why we do not consult with financial markets on bills. That would be like letting Uber drivers rewrite the road rules. Why don't we just get a hedge fund to have a look over and consult on our health policy? It is absolute stupidity. What we have seen today, as I said, is the economic insight of a toaster. It is just a joke. As I said, the member for Brighton warning us on this side about financial transparency is like Colonel Sanders giving a TED talk about chicken welfare. It is just silly.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, what the member for Frankston is saying at the minute verges on the requirement of a substantive motion. The member for Frankston is just casting aspersions on the member for Brighton which are verging on unparliamentary. I would ask you to counsel him against doing so.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): I listened to the member for Brighton's contribution on the bill, and it was very, very wideranging.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (17:29): I am not even pleased to rise on this. I am here to speak on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and interested in being lectured by those opposite about financial management and transparency.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: I hear some warblings from the member for Mordialloc, who knows full well, as does the member for Yan Yean and others on that side, that I have done my penance of 10 years on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), and frankly, to have the government on this side talking about financial management, particularly about transparency and accountability, just sticks in my craw somewhat.

As the member for Brighton indicated, there are some positive aspects to this legislation, but we should be aware of the genesis of it too. There are a couple of geneses of this legislation. Firstly, it is in part reflective of a piece of legislation from 2017 that ultimately lapsed after the 2018 election but more recently was announced as part of a review in the 2024–25 budget into the Financial Management Act 1994. I note from the briefing provided to the opposition on this bill that that review has not finished and neither is it to be released, and yet here we have a piece of legislation amending the Financial Management Act.

As I said, there are aspects of this that in principle are laudable and okay, but it is substantially weakened by the removal of some of the accountability measures that the member for Brighton highlighted, particularly through reduced budget reporting in election years, the removal of warrants and expanded discretionary exemptions for declared bodies. Whilst that is not the same as Treasurer's advances, I note that once again at PAEC just gone the issue of Treasurer's advances was a significant one as the government continues to use them in a manner that they were not originally intended for

and in a way to effectively hide from the scrutiny of the Parliament when it comes to government spending.

I note this is in a situation where the state is now heading for, by 2028–29, $194 billion of debt. That will amount to interest payments of $29 million a day or $1.2 million per hour, and every one of us on this side knows that we could do very useful things with that sort of money if it was not going to interest payments. I hasten to add, debt is not a bad thing in itself. We all understand on this side that governments of all persuasions for all time have always raised debt, and it is not an issue in itself. Most households have debt of some sort, particularly with their mortgage. The issue, though, is when that debt gets out of control, and when our net debt level is at 25 per cent of gross state product – as I said, $194 billion we are heading for – I would suggest that it is in fact out of control. When 10 per cent of government expenditure will be going on interest repayments, that is 10 per cent that could be better spent on hospitals, on nurses, on schools, on teachers, on police, on fixing our roads, on addressing the shortage of fire trucks in the emergency services and on all of those things, those services and that infrastructure, that our state needs and instead is going towards interest repayments, not necessarily for good debt but to pay off blowouts. We see in the budget papers, if anyone cares to have a look at budget paper 4 and compare the original estimated investment on the capital projects versus the expected investment, that there is a $48 billion blowout in those costs. That becomes a very large chunk of that $194 billion of debt, and that is where I say it is that waste and mismanagement that is an issue.

I talk about transparency, and I mentioned the CFA there a moment ago. We saw an example of it in question time just now, which was a follow-up to events of the last couple of weeks in PAEC. We asked a simple question of the Minister for Emergency Services as to what the budget for the CFA is, and we could not get an answer to that simple question. Indeed we asked the question of the minister, in the context of the budget decision to introduce the new emergency services tax and tax Victorians an extra $3 billion over the coming out years: what is the budget then for our emergency services, and specifically the CFA? The minister told us on 15 May that that will be in the budget. That was not in the budget. There was no such figure in the budget. So we tried again today and once again still could not get an answer. We are at 17 June. The financial year starts in two weeks. I would expect that agencies like the CFA, the SES and Fire Rescue Victoria would all like to know what their budgets are.

The context of that is, as I said, that just before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings began, the Treasurer published a notice in the *Government Gazette* which outlined the rates for the new emergency services tax and also outlined how much each of the recipients of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund would get. Now, those figures were there in black and white in the official government paper signed by the Treasurer, and whilst they were only the allocations from the emergency services fund, they also included a column as to how much of the total funding for those agencies was coming from the emergency services fund. So we know that the government said that the CFA and VICSES were getting 95 per cent of their funding from that figure in the column next to them. In the case of the CFA it was $312 million – 95 per cent. That is what the actual gazette said, signed by the Treasurer, so we can very easily, in a simple calculation, work out what the base funding for the CFA is, which was $328 million.

When that was put to the Treasurer and to the minister and to the Premier at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings, each and every one of them said, 'No, that is wrong.' The reason they were saying it is wrong is that it is a significant cut. We know also, on figures from the Treasurer's office, that the 2023–24 budget for the CFA was $370 million, so that is a nearly $42 million cut to the CFA if we take those gazette figures to be accurate. We also know that the Minister for Emergency Services at the time last year, who is now the Treasurer, in fact gave PAEC a figure for what the 2024–25 budget for the CFA would be – and that was $337.6 million. So either way you cut it, in the last two years the CFA has had a cut, and it is getting a cut again next financial year, 2025–26. I sat down after asking the simple question today, 'How much is the base funding budget for the CFA in 2025–26?' and I had the Premier yelling away at the table at me, saying, 'We answered this question.'

No, they have not answered this question. That is the whole point of why we have been asking. And we get again today the Minister for Emergency Services refusing to answer the question. She actually said, believe it or not, 'The figure will be reported in the annual report.' Well, that is handy: after the fact. Six or 12 months after the actual end of the financial year the CFA is going to find out what its budget is and the public is going to find out what its budget is. That is laughable.

I say to the Premier and I say to the minister: if the figures that were published in the gazette about the budget for the CFA are wrong, tell us what the actual figure is. Neither the Premier nor the minister today nor the Treasurer in PAEC would tell us. and I think that tells Victorians everything we need to know. It is one thing for the government to say, 'You're wrong. There is no cut to the CFA or the SES or Fire Rescue Victoria.' But if we are wrong, tell us what the true figure is. They have not done that It would be a very simple government political decision to actually tell us.

So we are looking now from 2023–24 to next financial year – 2023–24 being the last figures available: a $115 million cut to Fire Rescue Victoria; a $42 million cut to the CFA, as I said; an $8.5 million cut to VICSES, a $79 million cut to Triple Zero Victoria; and a $30 million cut to Forest Fire Management Victoria. This is the poor financial management of the government. They are taxing Victorians another $3 billion over the out years supposedly for emergency services, and yet our emergency services are actually being cut. The lack of transparency from the government on these issues today and over the past few weeks has been disgraceful.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (17:39): I am pleased this evening to have the opportunity to make a contribution on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and follow on from the terrific contribution made by the member for Frankston, who I think articulated the government's position in terms of both the mechanisms and the changes that are contained within this piece of legislation. These go to updating, modernising and improving the financial reporting obligations that we on this side of the house take very seriously and indeed make sure that the budgetary processes and a number of processes that are also contained within this bill and others will do a terrific job in making sure that those mechanisms are followed.

The key point around what is contained in the legislation, and the member for Frankston touched on this, is making sure that the framework that exists around financial management in our state is updated. 'Why do we need to do that?' some at home may be asking. It is because circumstances, technology, reporting obligations and different mechanisms change over time. What I think we are pointing out and what is occurring through this piece of legislation is a recognition of that, and it is not what we have seen from those opposite when it comes to some comments, particularly those from the lead speaker, made around this bill. In many instances the lead speaker either had not read the bill or was simply coming in here to make some sorts of wild accusations. What I think the member for Frankston outlined very well as the government's position is that this piece of legislation is an important step that we committed to taking and that performs a range of functions, as I mentioned earlier, that go to better financial management in this state.

The bill forms part of what is an ongoing legislative and non-legislative reform process for financial management. I mentioned the changes with both technology and reporting. If you think of various sectors, whether they be science and tech or innovation, the amount of diversity and the speed at which many of those industries and sectors have evolved and changed mean we need to make sure that we are taking the necessary steps to provide for those processes. That is why, across the nine important changes to the act, this work is being done in a diligent and dedicated manner, and that is why this bill is supported by the government.

I will just rattle off quite quickly the nine changes, which include the update to the financial management principles to better reflect the expectations of the government and the public sector; the embedding of a notification process where there is a risk that a department's or public body's budget may be exceeded; the inclusion of the power to include or exclude agencies from the operation of certain provisions of the Financial Management Act 1994; the clarification of accountable officer,

board and financial officer responsibilities; the adjustments to the requirements relating to the budget update in an election year; the adjustments to transition requirements for the September quarterly report; the strengthening of the requirements around the creation or cessation of agencies; the updates to regulations and direction-making powers; and the removing of the requirement for warrants. What we know – and this has been touched on previously – is that those changes through a growing economy, a growing population and a growing state, plus those mechanisms that intersect with the changes to technology and the additional reporting requirements that are needed, go to a better, stronger framework. On this side of the house we take those responsibilities very, very seriously.

The reflections that go to the budget and to many of the challenges, particularly post COVID and post the pandemic, have ensured that we have invested right across every single portfolio. There is the additional $11 billion-plus in health and the significant range of cost-of-living measures that were announced – whether that be extensions to existing grants and opportunities within our school settings, and the wonderful work that all of our teachers and staff do right across education; power bill relief; or the incredibly important opportunities that exist within public transport, including free PT for those under 18 from 1 January and for seniors on weekends – and a whole range of other opportunities that were outlined in the budget that was handed down. These of course build upon a massive pipeline of investment that goes to providing for what is a growing state: the removal of 86 dangerous and congested level crossings; the delivery of the West Gate Tunnel and the Metro Tunnel, both due to open this year; and the delivery of the North East Link and Suburban Rail Loop after that. There is a huge pipeline of works that this government is indeed working very, very hard on.

The provisions within this legislation go to the reporting and the financial management requirements within this state. They go to updating and modernising the framework that relates to those reporting requirements, making sure that we are focusing on delivery but also on reporting and making sure that we have a really important and sound obligation to be able to provide for the financial management within this state, as all other jurisdictions and territories do across the country – the feds as well. Making sure that those provisions are the best they can be goes to the heart of what this bill is about.

Unfortunately, what we see time and time again when we come into this place is a whole range of different policy positions and a bit of a circus from those on the other side of the house. But we are indeed focused on the important work of governing and outlining what was announced in the budget and the more than a decade of preceding budgets before that. We know and understand that local communities are at their best when they are supported by a government that listens to them and delivers for them, that makes sure to provide opportunities for our growing communities, particularly in our growth corridors. But no matter where you live, right across this state, we are making sure those opportunities exist through the budgetary process and through the range of programs and initiatives that exist within local communities, which is the most important obligation – of course alongside keeping people safe – that the government can continue to work on.

I want to take the opportunity to thank each and every person who has played a part in delivering this piece of legislation to the house, knowing and understanding that the work needs to continue and knowing and understanding that part of our functioning, thriving, positive and strong democracy is an obligation to acquit finances responsibly and do it in a way in which transparency is at the forefront. This bill improves those processes. This bill works to strengthen the provisions and the framework of the system as it currently is, but it recognises the fact that it has been a long time since some of those things have changed. In 2025 we need to make sure we are updating and modernising, and that is exactly what this piece of legislation does.

Despite what we have heard from some – and it is only early days in the debate – I think that we on this side of the house know and understand that the responsibility of governing is incredibly important. We take that responsibility seriously and we are making sure we are listening to local communities, we are acting and we are delivering. We are ensuring that we are delivering on the commitments we made, and we are making sure that the system is strong and sound and as good as it can be. Each and every day that we are on this side of the house and we have the responsibility of being members of

Parliament – particularly members of Parliament in an Allan Labor government – we are working with our communities. This is a profound privilege, and we will continue that work every single day.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (17:49): I rise to speak on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. As Treasurer Symes's office contacted us to indicate that this is a Treasury bill with both Treasury and finance elements, I am pleased to be able to rise and speak on the bill. If you ever wanted to see an example of a government engaged in spin and subterfuge, then you would need to look no further than this bill. It really has the hallmarks of a government doing whatever it can to avoid scrutiny, transparency and accountability. We will hear from Labor government members today how this bill will increase transparency, improve budget management and tighten controls. But what this bill really does, which you will not hear from a Labor government member today, is seek to deny Victorians the truth about how chaotic and dysfunctional Victoria's finances have become under the tired Labor government, the decade-old Labor government, because the principal purpose of this bill is to conceal how catastrophic Victoria's budget has become before the 2026 state election. The provisions in this bill will deny Victorians the truth before an election, because this bill seeks to remove their obligation to do the usual financial and budget reporting, for the Treasurer to not have to do that and not be true with Victorians about the state of finances under Labor. That is not transparency. That is not accountability. It is nothing but another attempt by this tired Labor government to withhold the truth from Victorians.

If you read the minister's second-reading speech tabled in this Parliament, which I assure you will not take you very long, the minister would have Victorians believe that this bill is the product of a review undertaken into the Financial Management Act 1994 that was announced in the recent 2024–25 budget to make it fit for purpose, but that is absolute spin, because almost 90 per cent of the proposed changes under this bill were proposed by the Labor government in 2017, more than eight years ago. In 2017 the Andrews Labor government introduced the Financial Management and Constitution Acts Amendment Bill 2017, and whilst that bill was much longer, it includes almost all of the amendments and changes that are now proposed in this 2025 bill. But it was so bad and not accepted back then that they did not even move past the introduction stage. They did not even debate the bill. All this tired Labor government have done is fossick around and go into the bottom drawer; they like the bottom drawer over in the Labor government. They have dusted off the old 2017 bill, and they have done a massive cut-and-paste job. To tell Victorians, as this government likes to do, that this bill is the product of some detailed in-depth review that they announced a couple of months ago in the 2024–25 budget is absolutely disingenuous. They only have to go and look at the lapsed bill from 2017 to know that, and I would invite the Labor government members to do so.

When we sought details of the review during the bill briefing through the Treasurer's office, the government could not even tell us who had conducted the review. They said that it was based on a review in the minister's second-reading speech. They could not tell us exactly who had done the review. All they could say was that it was an internal review in the Department of Treasury and Finance. When we asked whether we could be provided with a copy of the final report of the review, we were told the review had not been completed. You could not make this up, you really could not, because we are here debating a bill that is supposedly the product of a review that has not been completed. It is just absolute spin. When we asked if we could be provided with a summary of the review's recommendations, we were told that these matters are not normally discussed outside of government – lack of transparency again – so we find ourselves in this absurd situation where we are debating a bill that is supposedly the product of review that has not been completed yet and that the government will not even make public for Victorians to see.

One of the key objects of this bill is to remove the current requirement for the Treasurer to release a budget update and September quarterly financial reports in an election year. In an election year, when transparency should be at its highest, the desperate and tired Labor government now want to do everything that they can to avoid informing Victorians about the disaster the Victorian budget has become under their financial mismanagement. Labor know that come September next year, September

2026, the budget will be much worse than it is now, and they want to do everything they can to keep that from the Victorian people. You would think that given such significant measure it would warrant some comment or at least justification in the minister's second-reading speech. But it is not there. It is not in there; he did not even mention it.

Since 2000 it has been a requirement of any government to issue quarterly financial reports and a budget update. Since 2000 there have been six elections, and at no time prior to now has any previous government sought to remove this financial transparency and reporting. Even the Andrews government in 2022 did not seek to do this. The government argues these measures are required because the reporting requirements in an election year are kind of too difficult, a little bit too difficult – that it is a doubling up of work, because the government is required to issue a pre-election budget in any event. But that is absolutely more spin, because the fact is that the quarterly financial reports are required to comply with appropriate financial frameworks, meaning that they need to be properly audited and reliable. In contrast, there is no such requirement imposed on a pre-election budget update, which is only required to be on estimated financial statements or based on assumptions. None of the auditing or reporting disciplines that are required for properly prepared quarterly financial reports are required for a pre-election budget update. So it is clear the only reason why the government is seeking to introduce this is to conceal the true state of the financial disaster under this Labor government and what it has truly created for Victorians and the burden it has created for our children and grandchildren. It is a disgrace.

Another measure contained in this bill is to impose stricter reporting requirements on departments and agencies. Has the Labor government finally come to the realisation that it might be a good idea if bureaucrats were required to supply information about their finances rather than turning a blind eye to the constant financial mismanagement that is a hallmark of this Labor government? Again, this is another measure contained in the 2017 bill, and it is nothing new. You might also think it is a good thing for departments and agencies to be required to report to government if they are going to blow their budgets. The devil is in the detail in this bill. Whilst a department or agency will be required under this bill to report if they are going to exceed their budgets, there is nothing in the bill that imposes a strict timeframe for when this notification must occur. Experience suggests departments will usually attempt to avoid the embarrassment of reporting a budget blowout for as long as possible.

Another troubling aspect of the bill is that the power will be provided to the government to exclude agencies from the new reporting requirements. Under the bill, the Governor, on advice from the minister, will have the power to designate an agency as a declared body, meaning that they will not be required to inform the government if they have blown their budget – a very concerning carve-out. Based on what a declared body will be, as prescribed under the Public Administration Act 2004, you can see that under this new exclusion power there would be nothing to stop the government from declaring a body like the Suburban Rail Loop to be excluded from reporting if they have blown their budget. We know in the last financial year the Suburban Rail Loop Authority delivered a budget deficit of $3 million under former Labor hack James Merlino's leadership. We all know that the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, as an example, also has a budget deficit of almost $100 million. Well, there is nothing to stop this Labor government from excluding agencies like these – like VMIA, like the Suburban Rail Loop Authority, like WorkSafe Victoria, like Breakthrough Victoria – from these financial reporting requirements. Under this bill there is a provision that they may not ever have to do this, that they may not ever have to comply.

The government has argued that it is a power to give more independence to bodies like IBAC. I think this is ridiculous. I think that the former IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich KC would actually agree, because he has complained many times about not having enough budget to prevent corruption in this state. For the government to say that they want to remove the ability to provide this financial reporting is outrageous. This exclusion power will diminish transparency and accountability.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (17:59): Well, haven't we heard it all? We have heard here today the member for Brighton complaining that there are two sneaky things in the chamber. Well, I tell you

what, there are three sneaky things in the chamber: the member for Brighton, the Leader of the Nationals and the member for Evelyn. They are the only sneaky things that are in this chamber. Let me explain how what they have said is completely wrong and completely disingenuous and demonstrates that they actually have no regard for the truth, no regard for transparency and no regard for Victorian people.

The member for Brighton says that we want to hide how money is spent. If you have ever spent any time talking to a Labor MP, all we want to do is spruik what we are spending and talk about the fantastic budgets that we are promoting and that we are passing for the Victorian people, and I will get to a list of those things shortly. It is classic Brighton of course, talking down the Victorian economy as well. Fancy having a Shadow Treasurer who spends his time talking down the Victorian economy. The reality is that this government has productive debt. We have a plan to address it, and we are successfully implementing that plan. That is the truth of the matter.

We heard from the Leader of the Nationals. He is obviously missing his time in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, but perhaps he would have done better to listen to or attend and sit in the hearings, because he certainly misrepresented what was spoken about in PAEC in relation to funding for our emergency services. It was a bizarre process in PAEC. They were trying to make calculations on the back of an envelope and put it to department secretaries that this must be the way it is. That is not actually how you run governments. When they tried to make the case that the funding was set out in the gazettal rate, they were very clearly told by the department official – and I am going to quote for you, just to remove any doubt, because they keep repeating that falsehood in this chamber, so let me be very clear that this is a quote from the official:

> The gazettal rate excludes the investment that the government has made through the supporting emergency services volunteer initiative in the midyear update and also in further supporting our emergency services volunteers in the 2025–26 budget …

They also noted that it does not include Commonwealth contributions and contributions from other agencies which are made each year to our emergency services. All of that was said very plainly in PAEC, so who is being sneaky here? It is not us; it is those opposite. They explained that where we are in the financial year is when the budgets are being finalised and set by the various departments and agencies. It is classic Nationals, misleading emergency services in the community for their political gain – shame. Because the truth is that this budget has $2 billion in funding for emergency services. That is the truth of it.

To the third sneaky thing, and that is the member for Evelyn, who tried to make out that there is some difference between the pre-budget and quarterly updates when the content is the same, the analysis is the same and the checks and balances are exactly the same. So although we have had three sneaky attempts to mislead the chamber about this bill, I just will not have it, because none of them have spoken what is fair, true or transparent in this place. Let us not forget it; let us call them out every time. We cannot let them continue to talk down our economy, to lie about our investments and to use political approaches to what should be support across the board.

I wish to change track and change tone now in my contribution on this bill, because when I was thinking about this bill the first thing that came to mind was the lesson of the widow's mite. Some of you might be aware of the parable of the widow's mite, where a widow gives all that she has to the charity or the temple collection bowl. It reminded me of when I in my former life worked, as I did, for charities or for non-government organisations where we relied on donations from people. We spoke often in my organisation about a letter that we had received from a widow who, in her spidery cursive writing, apologised to us that she was only able to send us $10 because her husband had passed away. You know, times were tough on the pension, but she said, 'Here is what I can give. Here is what I have. Here is $10.' The idea of stewardship and of being entrusted to take care of every single dollar that you have is really central to the work of a lot of NGOs but also to this government – knowing what the money costs people, what tax contributions and other contributions are, and knowing we

have to use those funds in a fiscally responsible way so that we can keep on delivering for Victorians the frontline services that they need, especially those that are doing it tough, like that widow. That is why we have delivered such a strong cost-of-living support budget with such a strong focus on health and education.

As we have heard, this bill embeds the government's expectation for sound financial management – that every dollar will be cared for and spent wisely – into legislation by updating financial management principles around operating within your budget and also embedding notification processes when there is a risk or an expectation that a budget may be exceeded. We are making sure that the public service reflects our strong value of valuing every dollar. One of the ways that we are demonstrating that is through our fiscal strategy. Steps 1 through 3 have been completed, and step 4, which is the stabilising of net debt as a percentage of GSP, is forecast to be achieved from 2026–27. We are set up very well to achieve step 5 because our revenue forecast is growing significantly faster than our expenses. Total expenses for general government sector forecasts are up 2.6 per cent on average over the forwards relative to 3.8 per cent for revenue and 5.3 per cent in economic growth. So we are well set up to reduce net debt as a percentage of GSP.

I wish I had more time to speak on this. Financial management is a cycle, and this legislation means that at each point in the cycle we are strengthening accountability, transparency and oversight, making sure that budgeting is undertaken with the thought to delivering for Victorians and ensuring the fair provision of services for all, which is after all what a Labor government does. It is going to lead to improved internal processes, and it will mean that senior staff have increased attention to this and that the Department of Treasury and Finance has a line of sight to departments' expenditure where required. We manage budgets responsibly so we can deliver the frontline services Victorians rely on – real help with cost of living, good hospitals, schools and safe communities. Our 2025–26 budget shows this, with a $2.3 billion cost-of-living package in the latest budget. Let me run through a list in the time that I have left. Just from this budget alone, a $100 power saving bonus for concession –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, if the member has a contribution to make on the budget, I suggest she do that during her budget contribution speech rather than one on the financial management legislation.

Lauren KATHAGE: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I am explaining how tightened, strict and careful financial management means that we have the funds available to support Victorians with the cost of living.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): We have had a very wideranging debate. I ask the member to come back to the bill.

Lauren KATHAGE: The bill recognises that we have a set amount of money to support Victorians, and we choose to use that money carefully and wisely in the support of Victorians.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (18:10): I have got some comments to make on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. When I was listening to the contribution from the member for Yan Yean, I was wondering what planet she has been living on for a while. She talked about managing things in a fiscally responsible way, and I just cannot help but draw her to the fact that over the 158 years of Victorian Parliament up until 2014 the state debt was at $23 billion, on a downward trajectory, moving down from 6 per cent of gross state product. Ten years later, a decade later, that debt is banging on the door of being $200 billion – 25 per cent of GSP. That is extraordinary. I cannot really fathom how a government in 10 years can do such a job of wrecking the budget. On top of that, we heard at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that the Treasurer had not done any modelling on the fact that we could get a credit downgrade and what that would mean. None of that points to managing the budget in a fiscally responsible way, clearly in contradiction to what the member for Yan Yean believes in the face of that evidence. I think it is a lot of smoke and mirrors and debt and deceit here.

The bill before us, the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill, has had an interesting history. It was introduced in 2017 on 29 November by Minister Scott at the time, and it was called the Financial Management and Constitution Acts Amendment Bill 2017. That bill did not really go anywhere. It was second-read by the minister, and it was parked. A year later it still had not been debated, and then it lapsed. Over the previous four years of government – and now we are another 2½ years in, so 6½ years on – nothing has happened in this space. Now we have got this second attempt at this point in time. I read the second-reading speech with interest, and then I got out the bill. I could not really marry the second-reading speech, what was talked about in that second-reading speech, with what was actually in the bill; there was a really big mismatch for me.

Another thing that I found quite interesting was the timing. The 2024–25 budget papers announced that there would be a review of the Financial Management Act – okay, all good. Introduced in 1994, 30 years on – makes sense. It is time to have a look at that. It was around making the act fit for purpose and the public sector resilient to future challenges. Okay, you would think that is all right. This was a 2024–25 budget announcement, remembering that in 2017 this had already seen some light of day. The Department of Treasury and Finance did not advise that this was a result of the review that had been undertaken. They were doing a review and this was the result, but the review was not complete, so it sounds like there is a little bit of spin there. It was not going to be public, and getting a summary of that was not something that the government were open to.

If the bill was a result of the review which has just been done, certainly there are many bits of this bill that the government have mirrored from the 2017 bill. The common provisions between the 2017 bill and the one we have before us, which cannot have been as a result of the review unless they go, 'We didn't bother to do anything about that, but it's still relevant,' are about the removal of warrants, ministerial directions, financial management obligations and reporting and disclosure. There is quite a bit there. Both bills propose repealing warrant requirements, significantly diminishing the Governor and Auditor-General oversight. Both bills empower the ministerial directions, with clearer compliance obligations with regard to the financial management obligations. The introduction of overarching financial obligations for departments and public bodies mirrors the clauses in 2017, and there are similar proposals around reporting and disclosure obligations that existed then. It might be a little bit broader this time, because it has exemptions for declared bodies, which I will talk about in a moment.

We did ask a number of questions about this and we did have some interesting answers from the department, but I wanted to draw the house's attention to a couple of what I would call clangers in the second-reading speech. I would be almost embarrassed if I was the government that had these in the second-reading speech. I have got a quote:

> The Bill introduces a requirement for agencies to stick to their set budgets …

Oh, my goodness, I cannot believe that you have said that in the second-reading speech. It goes without saying that agencies should stick to their budgets. That is the whole point of having budgets in the first place. They are not there to be overrun and to rack up debt and then try and explain it later. The second part of that sentence is:

> … and report any financial risks through an 'early warning system'.

It tells me that government departments were going over their budget and sitting on their hands and not telling the ministers. The ministers should be asking how it is going, should be having very strong oversight of this, and I do not suspect that that is possibly what has happened because now they think they need to introduce legislation to get on top of this. Give me a break.

The other quote that I thought was interesting:

> The Financial Management Act of 1994 did not require departments and agencies to set a budget and to stick to it.

It is a little bit more of what I was talking about before.

> We will embed Government's expectations that sound financial management includes establishing, adhering to and monitoring set budgets put in place at the start of the year.

Seriously? Rather than legislation, there is a term called 'performance management'. If departments are not meeting their obligations, their expectations that they can run their show according to the budget that has been set down, that is a serious question about their capability – and certainly their financial capability. I know not everybody is versed in finances, but when you are running a department and you are the minister, you actually need to have a bit of oversight on this. I mean, I cannot understand why you have to put this in legislation. This is stuff that you cannot make up. This is what the government have really done, and some of the budget headings, budget discipline principles and budget overrun reporting – I mean, they have got a whole new section 44C that is going to be inserted that will require departments or public bodies to provide written notification to the department head of the Department of Treasury and Finance if the department or public body is likely to exceed budget. Seriously, the minister should be on top of this before it gets to that point, when things are looking a little bit dicey. The minister should have the accountability and nous to get on top of it and deal with it at that point, before we are left with a whole bunch of gremlins.

There are a couple of issues around transparency here – certainly the election period financial reporting exemption. The member for Evelyn did quite well outlining this here, that since 2000 when this was introduced there have been six elections requiring quarterly updates. Now all of a sudden it is an issue. I will tell you, we have got two former treasurers over here who said that it is not an issue at all.

There is an expansion for exemptions for declared bodies, a bit of carve-out there, and mostly the integrity bodies. But the advice that we received back from the department when we asked a number of questions – on top of the integrity bodies, there was the Victorian Electoral Commission, the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission, court services, Judicial College of Victoria and the commission. But it says this list is subject to change based on further consultation. That leaves it wide open. Who else are you going to bung in there? Is it going to be the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority? Is it going to be WorkSafe? We know the government do not like to be transparent here. We spent five years in a legal battle going to the Supreme Court to get an email that says, 'The health advice didn't say we should be locked down. It was actually the former Premier and current Premier who were calling out that.' With regard to WorkCover, we had a very protracted battle through the legal system to get a copy of a report that we got redacted. Then the next bit was a little bit less redacted, and finally, you know what, they had to hand it over. So the government did not want to be transparent, and for the members over there to talk about transparency: have a look at what you do, not what you say, because that is where the truth lies.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:20): What is the fundamental purpose of this bill? At its heart it is about boosting transparency and accountability and improving public sector management and reporting. I am going to take up some matters raised by the opposition. They do not want us to elevate convention and current practice into law – is that what they are saying? Surely it is more accountable to elevate it into law, so I am a little bit perplexed by the premise that the previous speaker from the opposition has taken – that they do not think we should do that. Surely that is only enhancing transparency. Whilst on the one hand, yes, convention should be adopted, but 'should' and 'must' are different things, and elevating convention into law – I am going to proffer and I am actually quite confident – is the most profound and important way, when we are talking about this particular context, and is certainly an element that can help to enhance Victoria's financial management framework. So I was quite surprised by that commentary about elevating convention into law and almost mocking that transition. I found that surprising at the least, because we are certainly being very up-front about the transition that we are putting forward as part of this bill. I would think that that would not be the strongest argument by the opposition to rebut the bill – to undermine that particular transition that is being put forward by this bill – when we are talking about greater transparency and accountability on public expenditure. It is certainly elevating accountability with regard to the public sector, so I would

have thought they would be on board with that. That particular line of conjecture was, can I say, perplexing, to say the least.

Anyway, I think I have made my point clear, and I hope that they will come on board with that and realise that legislation is actually a pretty effective mechanism in terms of being able to make clear the implementation of reform in this state and is certainly, I would proffer, stronger than convention alone. Maybe I am wrong. I do not think so; on this account I think we are heading in the right direction – so I am just putting that there. And certainly it is about cultural change, improving the management of fiscal risks and driving stronger discipline and increased oversight when it comes to public expenditure across the public sector. I think it is pretty evident that there is merit in driving this cultural change. We are being very up-front about the change. I would also say that strengthening public sector financial performance supports the government's fiscal strategy, delivering surpluses and boosting economic growth. We can see it is quite a congruent framework, so to speak, within which to operate.

I would like to also take up the matter of the warrants, because I could hear a lot of opposition from the opposition with regard to changing this particular process. I will say the warrant system really is an anachronism, and it persists in Victoria despite all Australian jurisdictions except WA having abolished it years ago. We are no longer storing gold underneath Parliament anymore. I think we have modern IT and banking systems and things such as annual reports. If you look at schedule 1, which will be amended as part of this bill, should it be passed – and I very much hope it will be – you can see that it is just providing a bulk figure in consolidated revenue. That is not exactly the most transparent mechanism if that is the hill we are going to die on when it comes to wanting to desperately hold onto warrants because of this fundamental premise of transparency and what they are claiming them to be. I am pretty comfortable with, and I think we can all be confident in moving forward with, letting go of this anachronism when we look at what it no longer delivers in terms of relevance but also accountability and transparency, as opposed to, for instance, an annual report, where you actually see the breakdown of the expenditure.

I would proffer that that is certainly a far greater representation when you are talking about government expenditure – when you actually break down the expenditure, as opposed to one bulk figure. I am not suggesting there is otherwise something improper about a warrant; I am just saying it is an anachronism, and it is not delivering what those opposite are claiming it does. I do not think that they need to keep white-knuckling this wonderful warrant system that that we have had in place all these years, particularly when you think of all those other Australian jurisdictions, save for WA, that have already let go of the warrant. I think that if they actually perhaps look at the act that is being amended and see what the warrant does and does not deliver, then they should be confident that they no longer need to white-knuckle it and really hold onto that as the last bastion of transparency for parliamentary processes – or government processes, I should say, more specifically. We have modern banking and IT systems and strong requirements to provide annual reports demonstrating how funds are allocated, rendering warrants practically outdated and ineffective. That is the other aspect of the conjecture from those opposite that I do not actually understand. I do not believe they have validated their argument for retaining warrants. It just does not make sense anymore. The removal of warrants improves administrative efficiency and allows the public sector to better focus its efforts on ensuring value for money in service delivery, so I think it is certainly a commonsense element of the reforms that are being brought about.

If we look historically, it was a Labor government – it was the Bracks government – that actually legislated the comprehensive reporting we have today. So instead of the degradation and decline of transparency and accountability, we know that effective mechanisms were put in place by the Bracks government. Just for the benefit of the chamber, I am going to refer to those. We have an audited financial report that provides the Victorian Auditor-General's independent perspective on the state's financial outcomes. We hand the budget over to the Auditor-General each and every year to sign off on before we publish it. We produce a midyear report and quarterly financial reports, and we publish a budget update ensuring that there is transparent and accountable financial reporting. Rather than

dramatising the changes that we are putting in place here with regard to the reporting requirements in an election year, whilst the bill will remove the requirement to publish the budget update on 15 December of an election year, governments may nevertheless choose to publish it. The bill merely provides some flexibility should it be needed – for example, if there is a change in government. The probability of a dramatic change within the 10 days or otherwise I think is highly improbable, so I think that the fanfare and the confected sort of concern by those opposite are definitely not warranted in this regard.

Overall, when we are looking at the principles of these changes, we are really updating financial management principles to better reflect the expectations of government and the public sector. Rather than working against transparency, I would say it is actually the opposite. It embeds notification processes when there is a risk that a department's or public body's budget may be exceeded. Why is that a problem? I do not get it. I do not understand why those opposite do not want that to happen – do not want it to be embedded in legislation. I do not believe they have put forward a solid argument on that front. It includes the power to include or exclude agencies from the operation of certain provisions of the Financial Management Act 1994. It clarifies accountable officer, board and chief financial officer responsibilities. There you can see an enhancement, not a detraction, of clarity when we are looking at these responsible roles. It adjusts requirements relating to the budget update in an election year, as I stated at the outset, with important caveats so that transparency is not compromised in that space. It adjusts transmission requirements for the September quarterly report, strengthens the requirements around the creation or cessation of agencies, updates the regulations and direction-making powers and, as I said before, removes the requirement for those outdated, anachronistic warrants.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (18:30): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution and certainly follow on from the member for Eildon, who hit the nail on the head when she said, 'Where have some of these people been hiding to come out with some of the stuff that we are hearing on this bill tonight?' In fact I think I found an error in the naming of the bill. It is the financial mismanagement legislation. That is exactly what we are talking about here: mismanagement, not management. Mismanagement is a hallmark of what this Labor government is doing. We have got so many budget overruns. We have got cost blowouts. We have got financial mismanagement from wall to wall. When I read the second-reading speech – and the member for Eildon picked out another quote – right at the beginning it says:

> This Bill is another example of this Government's commitment to sound financial management.

When has there ever been any sound financial management, let alone another example? That implies there has already been an example and this is another one.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Tim McCURDY: Exactly. Show me one example of decent financial management that this government has done. In fact I think they need to sack the speechwriter or at least do a welfare check, because honestly it is out of control, this second-reading speech. It goes on a bit further, and again this is not the quote that the member for Eildon had:

> We continue to demonstrate targeted and disciplined financial management … This represents a prudent and systematic approach to strengthening the long-term sustainability of the State's finances.

Surely it is not April Fools' Day. I cannot believe that the government has the arrogance or the gall to come in and talk about financial management legislation, when we know very well we have gone from about $20 billion to $190 billion under the watch of this government. It is absolutely disgraceful. If we talk about financial mismanagement, I have got a couple of examples here, one being the West Gate Tunnel. If you want to talk about financial mismanagement, it started at $5.5 billion, and it is going to be closer to $10 billion. $10.2 billion is the latest figure – double, from $5.5 billion to $10 billion.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Tim McCURDY: Yes, someone is trying to defend that. I cannot believe it. It is like going to see someone who is going to build you a house and land package and asking, 'How much is the house and land package going to cost?' 'Oh, it's going to be $600,000.' 'Great, sign me up.' They come to give you the keys at the end of it and say, 'Actually it's $1.2 million. It's double what we first thought it was going to be.' How are you going to take that? Those on the government benches seem to think that Victorians just want to keep accepting this.

The North East Link's $10 billion cost has blown out to $20 billion, another doubling. Mismanagement is how we have got here. Again, it is like if you go and see a Toyota dealer, sign up to get a new Camry and he says it is $50,000 and you go and get the keys and he says, 'Sorry, it's actually $100,000. Just make it $100,000 and we'll call it quits.' Do these people expect people would just take that on face value and say, 'Okay, I'll pay the $100,000. I know we talked about $50,000'?

The member for Benambra will like this one. The Suburban Rail Loop, the daddy of them all, is $34 billion, and it is going to blow out to $125 billion on the latest estimates – nearly four times the cost. Member for Benambra, if you went across to the Impy and asked the publican how much a pint of beer was and he said it was $15 you would say, 'Well, pour me one'. Then if he poured you the pint of beer and said, 'That'll be $55, thank you,' you would say, 'Stick your pint of beer where the sun don't shine. I'm not paying $55. You told me it was going to be $15, and now you're telling me it's $55. It's nearly four times the price.'

This is what those on the government benches do not realise. All their projects blow out by double, triple, quadruple. If we did a lie detector test on half of those on the government benches, I actually think that they would not even believe the story. But they are too scared to stand up to their leadership. They are too scared to stand up for their communities, and they just do not care. They think Victoria will just pick up the tab. Well, Victoria is sick of picking up the tab, and I think some of those who sit on margins of less than 10 per cent better start standing up to their leadership and standing up for their communities and just do something. As the great John Kennedy said, just do something: 'Don't think; don't hope – do.' And while they are not doing anything, well, they are eroding their own seat, and their own community know that. Why? Because Victoria needs them to stand up, their community needs them to stand up and even their own family needs them to stand up. If they have the courage, it is not too late to do it.

These blowouts and these financial mismanagements that I talk about – their own goals – are why the ambos are ramped. People are dying waiting 5 hours for an ambo that is ramped somewhere else – just disgraceful. Energy prices have gone through the roof, but renewables will be the answer; your energy prices will come down. What a disgrace. They have not come down. It is just another Labor lie. Financial mismanagement – we talk about the $29 million a day or $1.2 million an hour that we are going to be spending on interest. This is absolutely out of control. To try and fix that, they do not turn around and say, 'Oh, well, we'll just back off on the spending. We'll just introduce more taxes or increase more taxes' – 60 new taxes. I have got a whole list of them. Victorians are paying more and getting less.

Labor always say in this place that they stand up for the battler – that they are the party for the battler. Well, ask the battler how they are going at the supermarket. Their prices are not coming down there; they cannot afford to fill their supermarket trolley. Ask the battler how they are getting on with their power bills because of this ideological renewables process that they are going through. They are just going to continue to see power bills go up. Ask the battler how they feel about those power bills. In whichever area you look at – registration on cars or anything like that – they are certainly not helping the battler. It is a deception.

Having said all this, this bill is critical. We have heard some of the speakers on this side actually talk about what damage this bill does. It is a lack of transparency that we will have that comes out of this

bill. Clauses 5 and 6 – the establishment or abolition of entities and warrants – require ministerial consultation for entity creation or abolition, adding administrative complexity, and remove warrant-based procedures, as you have heard from the member for Brighton, eliminating critical oversight previously provided by the Governor and the Auditor-General. Furthermore, it reduces election period financial reporting – how dare they? Reporting exemptions, clauses 8 to 10, removing Governor-issued warrants, erode crucial checks historically conducted by the Auditor-General and the Governor, reducing independent scrutiny. This is deceitful, it is dishonest and it needs to be called out.

I am also concerned about the amount of debt that Victoria finds itself in. We know we have gone from what was around $20 billion. In fact in 1970 it was $6 billion, and it took 44 years to get from $6 billion to $20 billion-odd dollars. It did not take long to get from $20 billion to $194 billion, and now we face a Mount Everest type mountain of debt that we have got to try and get over.

As I say, if only this government would turn around and say, 'Let's back off a bit; let's try a little bit harder,' but they just keep going, keep spending. Now we have got the Treasurer in New York – I think she may still be there or has just arrived – begging the credit rating agencies to try and keep our credit rating at what it is. I mean, we have gone from AAA to AA-plus to AA. We have had two hits on our credit rating, and now she is out there begging to keep our credit rating where it should be.

Members interjecting.

Tim McCURDY: You do not like to hear the truth. I know that. That is a concern.

Members interjecting.

Tim McCURDY: Oh, she is back, is she? She has just got out of business class, and now she is back. She has got a bit of dirt on her knees from where she was down begging to make sure that we can keep our credit rating instead of getting another drop like we have had. It really is a disgrace, as I say, the gall and the gumption of this government to bring in a bill called financial management. It is just spin and deception.

I have heard those on the other side talk about this bill. They go on and on and on, but they will not address the problem. Stop the spending, slow the spending down and stop the blowouts. Victoria wants the truth and Victoria deserves the truth, and this bill will not deliver the truth.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (18:40): It gives me great pleasure this evening to rise and speak in favour of the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. However, it has not been a great pleasure over the last several hours to tune in, whether it be on the TV in my office or in this place, to the contributions of some of those opposite. It would seem to me that the vast majority of them take their brain out before they walk into the chamber.

Roma Britnell: You're the main culprit.

Dylan WIGHT: So says the member for South-West Coast. The last thing I would be doing if I was a member of the opposition benches would be critiquing the performance of anyone on this side. Deadset, it is like you take your brains out of your head before you walk into the chamber to make a contribution. We just heard the member for Ovens Valley compare major infrastructure projects to house and land packages. I cannot wait for Metricon to build a tunnel under a river. Seriously, the economic ineptitude and the lack of capacity for anybody on that side of the chamber to make any sort of meaningful contribution that makes any sense – it would be funny if it was not dangerous to democracy. He went on, when talking about a government financial management bill that talks primarily about oversight, to start quoting the price of beer and supermarket shops and talking about how it is the government's fault that people out there are paying more for groceries when we are talking about a financial management bill that talks primarily about oversight. Honestly, we are here to do important work, not listen to the incoherent ramblings of some pretty dim individuals. Every week that goes by and the more divided that they get, the worse this becomes.

A member interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Indeed – so distracted. More worried about themselves than they are about coming in here and doing the incredibly important job that hardworking Victorians have voted for them to do. There have been several contributions prior to me on this piece of legislation, and several of them have been pretty misleading. This is a pretty commonsense bill that aims to continue this government's fiscal plan as outlined towards the end of the COVID pandemic and the restrictions that existed around that. It makes major upgrades to the Financial Management Act 1994 as well as amendments to the Constitution Act 1975 and the Local Government Act 1989 to modernise and clarify financial governance across departments and public bodies, to improve reporting and accountability and also remove outdated requirements for warrants to issue public money.

As I said, there have been several contributions prior to mine. Indeed, the member for Brighton, who is charged with being the Shadow Treasurer and the opposition's financial spokesperson, has come in here and done nothing more than mislead the house and mislead Victorians as to the intentions of the government. To say that this bill has anything to do with watering down or weakening accountability, or to hide things that are in the budget and reporting requirements, is blatantly untrue. We all understand how politics work, and I understand that the opposition think they have got a job to do, but you cannot just come in here and mislead people. You cannot just go out and drum up fear in the community and think that that is going to be your 1 wood for two or three years, but they know no other way. They know no other way, so they will come in here and they will mislead Victorians at every opportunity that they get.

They bang on and they talk about debt a lot. They also talk about the price of beer and things of that nature as well, but they love to talk about debt. Debt to gross state product is a relatively new measure in Victoria, but if we make our way back to some of the biggest spending governments in this state as a proportion of that measure of GSP, I think it is important to go back to the 1970s and talk about the Bolte government. GSP was not a measure that we used at that time, but if it was, then debt to GSP would have been hovering in the low 40s as a percentage, which indeed would be the highest debt-to-GSP ratio since the Second World War. I am not here to criticise that government for the decisions they made. I am certainly not here to say that a contemporary government in Victoria should aim to get to that level of debt as compared to gross state product. But I think it is important to note why that government was in debt to that amount, and it was because the Bolte government and the Liberal government of those years knew that it was incredibly important to build infrastructure for Victorians and to build and deliver the services that Victorians needed, so they went into debt to do that. Our infrastructure spend accounts for a decent portion of the debt-to-GSP ratio that we have in Victoria today, which is in the 20s.

If we look at infrastructure spend over probably the last 15 years, we came to government and we made no secret of the fact that were going to increase infrastructure spending and we were going to build projects. We were going to do so because it improves the lives of Victorians. It makes it easier for them to get to work. It also drastically improves productivity, which is really important. Projects like the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel and the North East Link have several benefits. They have benefits to productivity – getting to work and home from work sooner – but they also mean that Victorians can spend more time with their family, which is incredibly important as well. But it is important to note when we won government in 2014 we had to make up for four years of nothing. Victorian political history may as well just have a blank slate from 2010 to 2014. It is the reason that the Liberal Party were only in for one term, because they did absolutely nothing in four years time. So we came to government, and we made no secret of the fact that were going to increase infrastructure spending.

We have had a global pandemic, and we have got some supply chain issues and we have got some workforce issues as a result of that, so yes, costs have increased, not just in Victoria but across the whole eastern seaboard. This whole notion that this is a problem that is confined to Victoria, that when the Liberals were in government in New South Wales they did not have the same problem – there

were some increased costs, which obviously adds to that. We got to a point where in 2023–24 our infrastructure spend was $24.2 billion. I think the important part to note about that is from that peak of $24.2 billion over the forwards, our infrastructure spend will come down to $15.6 million whilst debt stabilises.

There is a quiet thing that those opposite will not say out loud. As I said in the last sitting week, there is only one bloke – that McCracken fellow in the other place – that will say it out loud. Whilst those opposite will not say the quiet thing out loud, all they talk about is cuts in spending and cuts in debt. We are 18 months or so from an election. They should come clean with the Victorian people as to how they are going to achieve that. We know that they will cut infrastructure projects; they have already said that. McCracken has admitted that they will have to cut spending, so then we have got to talk about what. I can tell you what: school breakfast clubs, the school saving bonus, power saving bonuses, free public transport for children under the age of 18. All the things that those opposite would never support in a million years will be cut if they ever get the gift of government again, and they should come clean with the Victorian people. If they could stop fighting amongst themselves, they might be able to give a cogent plan to the Victorian people.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (18:50): I rise to speak on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, a bill that seeks to amend the Financial Management Act 1994, the Constitution Act 1975 and the Local Government Act 1989. Interestingly, this bill has been seen before – introduced in the 58th Parliament, or about 2017, but abandoned and now resurrected. It is actually no surprise that it did not progress previously, and it should not be a surprise now, because if there were ever a government that should not be loosening the levers on financial accountability, it is this one. The Allan Labor government is the worst economic manager in the state's history. According to the government, this bill arises from a financial management review – a review that is not complete. We have seen this before: the government uses an excuse of a review, but with the review not being complete, there are no recommendations for the government to act on.

There are several deeply concerning aspects of this bill, and the Liberal Party will be opposing it. First and foremost is the proposal to remove the requirement for quarterly reporting in the December quarter of the next election year. The government claims their pre-election budget is sufficient, but given their consistent failure to deliver on budgets, blowing them year after year, it is no wonder they do not want to be held accountable. Accountability should not be optional, especially not when public money is at stake. Victorians deserve transparency, particularly at election time, but this government wants to hide the truth from them because the truth is not flattering.

We the opposition are alarmed by the proposals of clauses 5 and 6, and in particular the repealing of section 17 of the act, effectively eliminating a longstanding warrant-based procedure and critical oversight from the Governor and the Auditor-General. The government argues that other states have already moved away from this model, but that conveniently ignores one glaring fact: no other state is carrying Victoria's debt. Let us be clear: under Labor, Victoria's debt exceeds that of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. What do we have to show for it? Are services better? Are outcomes improving? No. In fact Victorians are paying more and getting less.

This is the same government that has introduced over 60 new taxes after promising not to introduce any. When challenged, some Labor members say, 'Well, how else do you raise revenue?' That tells you everything. They do not understand or, worse, do not care that you do not tax your way to prosperity. You incentivise growth, you back small business, you create an environment where people can innovate, invest and expand – that is how you raise revenue without punishing families.

One of the most baffling inclusions in this bill is the provision stating that departments and public bodies should operate within their budgets. On the surface you might say, 'Well, that's a good thing and actually something everyone would expect.' But hang on, that is not the breakthrough; basic financial responsibility is not what this government is after. The fact that it is being included now and being paraded as reform just shows how far standards have fallen, because that is something that

should always be expected – to stay within your budget. But even the inclusion of that part in the bill is toothless in itself, because there is no enforcement mechanism, just vague wording saying that the departments 'should' stick to budgets. Well, this government should do a lot of things, but we know from history that 'should' means nothing if there are no consequences for failure. As an example, one might note the seven IBAC reports calling out this government and its bad behaviour.

Worse still, this Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill allows the Allan Labor government to carve out public bodies from budget adherence requirements if it so chooses. So, sure, you might say that might be a good idea for, say, IBAC or Court Services Victoria, but this is Labor. They will do everything and anything that suits them. That means bodies like WorkSafe might be excluded. As we have already been shown, they have got themselves into some hot water. Look at WorkSafe. It is an agency that should be safeguarding Victorian workers, yet the financial position has deteriorated so badly that its very existence was putting the functioning safety net under serious threat. That is not hypothetical; that actually happened. Another example: what if Labor carves out the Suburban Rail Loop Authority, a project that has no business case and keeps moving the budgetary goalposts? The state of Victoria just cannot afford this white elephant.

This bill pretends to improve financial management, but in reality it just erodes accountability. If you want a case study on Labor's failure to manage money, just look at the last decade: over $14 billion blown in project overspends – $14 billion of taxpayer money. That is Victorians' money wasted. And while government is blowing billions, we have a housing crisis. I see every day in South-West Coast people sleeping rough in freezing cold conditions and women escaping violent homes, trying to find somewhere safe for themselves and their children, being told there is nothing. Our public housing waitlists have ballooned to over 64,000 people. In 2014 under a Liberal government that number was 9900. It has exploded under Labor's watch. I have had people come into my office talking about public homes sitting empty – dozens and dozens across South-West Coast that have sat idle for months, sometimes years. The locals who do the maintenance program for the government or who have worked in the department of housing say that the government have run out of that particular bucket of money for minor repairs, and perfectly good homes sit idle.

In February 2024 I raised a particular house in Crawley Street in Warrnambool that had sat idle for almost a year. I put it on *A Current Affair*. In October last year it was still vacant. It seemed to be in reasonable condition, and shortly after – because clearly I embarrassed the Labor government – they demolished it. Now, months later, it is still sitting as a vacant block. This is disgraceful. People are homeless, and that is the sort of program this government runs. The Shadow Minister for Housing tells me that only 14 units have been built on vacant government land. Is this why this land sits idle? It is a big block, and the government should be building family homes on it – probably more than one. This example really is just one example, and I constantly have constituents coming into my office reporting that perfectly good homes sit vacant for long periods of time. Often they are single mums waiting for a home who would be grateful for the roof over their head of a home they are saying has been sitting there for months.

This government talks about their Big Build, but since the announcement in 2020 there are 224 fewer public homes in Victoria than before they started the program. The goal for new community housing was missed, with only 30 per cent of their target delivered. In terms of affordable housing, the government promised 2900 homes, and just 640 have been built. That is not progress, that is failure. That is broken promises. Even worse, there are now 3400 fewer public housing bedrooms in Victoria than there were when this program began. We do not just have fewer homes, we have less capacity. So when this government brings in legislation on financial management, asking the Parliament to trust them – to ease off reporting, to remove oversight and to believe that departments should stick to budgets – I just say: no chance. You want trust? Earn it. You want fewer reporting requirements? Start meeting the ones you have already got. You want to modernise oversight? Then strengthen it; do not gut it.

Victorians are paying the price for this government's failure every single day. Whether it is power bills, housing stress, a health system in crisis or the growing weight of cost-of-living pressures, it comes back to the simple truth: Labor cannot manage money. And when you cannot manage money, you cannot manage services. You cannot deliver what people need. The Allan Labor government has lost control of the state's finances, and this bill does nothing to fix that. In fact it makes things worse. By reducing transparency and weakening accountability, that just gives this government more ability to make it worse. That is why we will be opposing the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and standing up for a Victoria that expects better, demands more and deserves a government that knows the value of a dollar.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

> That the house now adjourns.

Doncaster water infrastructure

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:00): (1181) My matter tonight is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in relation to the Big Build, and while the matter I raise tonight is in relation to the Timber Ridge Reserve pressure-reducing station, which is a water facility, it is being approved under the auspices of the Big Build and its planning facilitation is coming through as part of the Big Build. As a consequence, the reason I raise the issue in relation to the Timber Ridge Reserve pressure-reducing station in Doncaster is because there was a water pressure reducing station that was located near the Eastern Freeway. It has had to be moved as the Eastern Freeway works are ongoing, and that facility needs to be put in place to manage the population growth around central Doncaster. I accept that, and residents accept that too, and it does need to be moved away from its current site, although why a site close to the Eastern Freeway was not chosen when there are many of them is perplexing.

That aside, the site chosen is along a street called Timber Ridge, which is further up towards Doncaster Hill, and it is at the Timber Ridge Reserve. I want to read, if I can, into *Hansard* from the government's Big Build website the description of the pressure-reducing station. It says:

> As part of the Eastern Freeway upgrade, we're relocating a Pressure Reducing Station (PRS) to Timber Ridge Reserve and upgrading water mains on Ayr Street and Timber Ridge.

Fair enough.

> The new station will be housed in a compact 18.9m x 15.1m structure at the corner of Timber Ridge Reserve, requiring only a small portion of the reserve.

Residents quite obviously take issue with the term 'compact' for a 19-by-15-metre structure. I accept that some of it will be underground, but 19 by 15 metres is around 285 square metres, which is half a modern housing block size. It is the size of a four- to five-bedroom house, two-thirds the size of a basketball court and around 11 to 14 car spaces. To give you an indication, a tennis court is 260 square metres, so a 285-square-metre facility is quite large, and residents are quite concerned about it. Permission from the council still has not been granted, yet Yarra Valley Water has removed trees on this site. The open space which is set to disappear right next to a playground is going to lock that playground off from Timber Ridge.

There is an alternative further along Timber Ridge. Opposite St Malo Avenue there is a location where the facility could be located, and it could be located away from right next door to residential homes. My action item tonight is to ask the minister to investigate relocating this facility at that location and to spare Doncaster residents the problems and the issues of living next to a 24-hour facility that will create noise issues for them that they have not been experiencing to date.

Kororoit electorate small business

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (19:03): (1182) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Small Business and Employment, and it is great to see her in the chamber here tonight. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the support available to small businesses across the Kororoit electorate and to outline how the government is working to ensure that businesses in our outer suburban growth areas are receiving the targeted assistance that they need to thrive.

Small businesses are the backbone of our local economy, as the minister well knows, and I had the great pleasure of having her out at Kororoit last week to visit a number of small businesses. They create jobs, they support families and they bring life to our community centres, such as shopping strips. In Kororoit I have had the pleasure of visiting many such businesses, and I want to acknowledge the incredible contributions that they make, often in the face of significant challenges.

In Caroline Springs I recently visited Désir wine bar and No9 the Cafe, two locally owned and operated businesses that not only offer excellent hospitality but also play an important role in building a community connection. Like many in the hospitality sector, they have had to navigate rising supply costs, shifting consumer behaviours and the pressures of staying competitive in a fast-changing economy. In Derrimut, GB Financials is another great example of a small business providing professional services to both individuals and families, helping locals make informed financial decisions at a time when economic uncertainty is front of mind for many. And in Deer Park, Roxy Kebabs, which is quite famous, has long been a community staple – a family-run business that has served generations of local residents. They too have shared with me the everyday realities of running a small business, from rising energy costs to access to skilled staff.

In Rockbank small retail and service providers are emerging as the population continues to grow rapidly, yet many of them face limited access to commercial support and networks due to the area's still developing infrastructure. Similarly, in Albanvale small shopfronts and family-run operations form the backbone of local trade, but these businesses often miss out on grant opportunities or advisory support simply due to a lack of awareness or capacity to navigate government systems.

These examples reflect a broader need for more accessible localised small business support, whether it is mentoring, grant information, digital training or improved access to procurement opportunities. I ask the minister to please outline what is currently being done to support small businesses in growth areas like Kororoit and how we can better ensure that these vital operators have the tools and resources that they need to not only survive but of course to grow and succeed long into the future.

Drought

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:05): (1183) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is immediate financial and practical drought relief for farmers across the Mallee, who are facing one of the most challenging seasons in recent memory. The Mallee is dry, always has been, but this year it is a different kind of dry. Rainfall is well below average, despite the 10 to 15 millimetres we got a couple of weeks ago, which I know has been defined as 'enormous' by some but is barely enough to wet the ground in some places. The subsoil moisture is vanishing despite the evolution in agriculture and farming practices, and the costs of feed and water are skyrocketing and will continue to do so. Farmers are destocking, only just bringing lambs back in a couple of seasons ago; delaying planting decisions and questioning whether what they have planted and sowed will actually come up; and they are questioning how they will get through the next few months, let alone the season.

In towns like Ouyen, Manangatang, Walpeup and Underbool, the heart of the dryland farming community, and Patchewollock as well, who are also facing the very real onslaught of wild dogs given the removal of the non-protection order, families are under enormous pressure, and yet there has been deafening silence from this government. For those farming in the Mallee we need targeted support, not more bureaucracy, not more layers of bureaucracy and not things to droughtproof farms for the

future. We need relief now, like emergency financial assistance for primary producers experiencing severe crop and stock losses; rate relief, given their rates can be into the tens and hundreds of thousands and are only going to get worse; freight subsidies for fodder and water; mental health outreach for isolated farmers doing it tough – we have some of the most isolated farmers in this state; and a simplified process for accessing support, not more hoops to jump through and not on a dollar-for-dollar basis that counts an incredible amount of farmers out.

These are not just numbers on a spreadsheet. These are people. These are families. These are farmers growing the food and fibre that feed and clothe this state. They clothe this nation. They feed the world. They do not ask for much. They never do. There is no-one more resilient than a Mallee farmer, but right now they just need a hand up – not a handout, just a hand up – until the seasons turn. That is all we are asking for. So I urge you, Minister, please, some relief for farmers in the Mallee, and please come and visit. See it for yourself.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind the member that 'you' refers to the Chair.

Bellarine electorate bus services

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:08): (1184) In this year's 2025–26 state budget a regional bus network review was announced, and the action I seek is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport to provide an update on how this review will specifically benefit communities across the Bellarine Peninsula. I hear often from Bellarine constituents and the communities that the Bellarine bus service – and it is the only public transport service we have on the Bellarine – is not meeting the needs of the community. We are growing, our demographics are changing and we do need a service that supports a more efficient service for our communities. It was also recently announced in that budget that from January next year children and young people under the age of 18 will be able to travel free on public transport. This is welcome news for families, reducing the cost of travel and improving accessibility for young people to independently go to their work, school or social activities, and this builds on another announcement that the Victorian Seniors Card holders will also have expanded access to free weekend travel across the state, alongside their continued weekday discounts.

While both of those initiatives are really excellent and important cost-of-living pressure initiatives, there does remain a gap on the Bellarine in connecting our communities, particularly across the Bellarine – like a connecting, cross-Bellarine service. Young people do reach out to me. They talk about getting to work and going to their sports. Residents are wanting to attend medical appointments. They may not be travelling into Geelong to catch a train; they are trying to just connect across the Bellarine. This is vital to improving our connectivity, mobility and inclusion. Our regional bus network review and our Bellarine review present a really valuable opportunity for the community to reshape our transport system and also to have a say on what their needs are and better support our community, so I look forward to hearing from the minister on how this review will help address those transport challenges that we have across the Bellarine electorate.

Patrick School of the Arts

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (19:11): (1185) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Education, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to reverse the decision preventing year 7, 8 and some year 9 students from being enrolled in the Patrick School of the Arts located in Prahran. The school is Australia's leading industry performing arts institution and offers programs for years 7 to 12 as well as tertiary programs. The Department of Education and Virtual School Victoria, that is VSV, have created an enrolment crisis and total confusion. Students and families are caught in a web of contradictory directives.

In October 2024 VSV advised that students were required to attend auditions held by Creative Australia approved companies for 2026 enrolments, yet none of these companies were informed of this requirement, none are willing to undertake this process and, critically, none specialise in musical theatre, the core focus of the school. All new students applying for the school and currently enrolled

students in years 7, 8 and 9 have to undertake this new endorsement application – or 'no endorsement' application, depending on what email you read from VSV – to get into the school, essentially shutting out all new applicants for years 7 8 and 9 and affecting current students wanting to enrol. The confusion deepened in June when VSV contradicted their own advice, stating these same companies 'can't refer your students' but 'can refer their own students'. This makes no sense when none of these approved organisations are even secondary education providers. Minister, families are preparing for July auditions with no clarity about enrolment pathways. When the school sought clarification, they were told both the VSV principal and deputy principal are on leave until term 3, after auditions conclude. The acting principal admits, 'This is outside of my portfolio.'

The administrative bungle is devastating families. I have been contacted by one family with a current enrolled year 7 student who has been informed that despite that she successfully completed year 7, VSV will no longer allow her to enter year 8, but that she can return in year 9. Her parents moved closer to Prahran and the school so she could attend. Her local high school does not even have a vacancy for her in year 8. This forces a one-year gap in her secondary education journey. What an absolute disgrace. Parents have invested in their children's artistic education, students have committed to specialised training and a vital community institution faces potential collapse.

The school is so well regarded that its alumni are in the world tour of *Moulin Rouge!* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Even *The Lion King* producers have called the school to request auditions with its students. If this is not rectified, the students will miss extraordinary training and development, the school will lose enrolments and Victoria will lose its ability to contribute to a vital arts scene. We cannot allow illogical decisions to destroy this institution and dash the dreams of young artists. The viability of arts education in Victoria depends on your immediate action. The July auditions cannot proceed without clarity, and our community cannot afford to lose this cultural cornerstone to administrative chaos. The time for action is now, Minister. I call on you to resolve the VSV criteria confusion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members about the use of the word 'you'.

Altona Meadows road infrastructure

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (19:14): (1186) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the next steps for the Newland Street exit upgrade. It is important for the residents of Altona Meadows, which is within the community that I represent. Having pride in your community and having places that are clean, tidy and welcoming are important. Over 600 residents signed the petition to see the area cleaned up and upgraded. I delivered this petition to the minister, and I thank the minister, who took these concerns so seriously on behalf of the community and who knows the community so well because we share a boundary at Laverton Creek. This budget delivered the funds to clean up and fix up the Newland Street exit. I know this will take a little while to go through the appropriate processes of government, but I know also how keen the community is to hear about the next steps.

Housing

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (19:15): (1187) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to amend the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 to formally recognise housing as a human right. I rise this evening to urge the Premier to principled action on one of Victoria's most pressing and deeply entrenched challenges: the housing crisis. Across our state housing insecurity and homelessness are rising to unprecedented levels. This crisis is not abstract. It is visible in every electorate, from people sleeping in cars and couch surfing to families trapped in a cycle of unaffordable, insecure rentals. I have seen the impact firsthand. Over the past few months I have spent several mornings at Ringwood and Mitcham train stations speaking to people in my electorate who are struggling with housing insecurity. I have listened to heartbreaking stories from constituents, frontline workers, advocates and experts, people who deal every day with the consequences of a housing system that is not working. And the message is clear: we need to do more and we need to embed this commitment in law.

Since launching my campaign to enshrine the right to housing in the charter, I have hosted a housing panel with some of the leading voices in the sector: Rob Pradolin from Housing All Australians, Major Brendan Nottle from the Salvation Army and Cr Sarah McKenzie, the deputy mayor of the City of Yarra. This morning I tabled a petition in this place, signed by over 600 Victorians, calling for the right to housing to be recognised in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Right now over 65,000 applications are on the waiting list for social housing in Victoria – 65,000 applications waiting for the safety, dignity and stability that a home provides. The charter currently protects vital rights like equality before the law, protection from torture and freedom of expression. But it fails to include a right so foundational that it underpins all others: the right to a safe and secure place to live. Without this, governments can continue to treat housing as a policy preference, not a legal obligation.

Including housing as a human right in Victoria's charter would change that. It would require all future bills brought before this place to be assessed for their impact on housing access, creating a new standard of accountability. As former Supreme Court Justice Kevin Bell AO KC rightly said, government is responsible beyond the given electoral cycle for ensuring access to decent housing. Amending the charter would embed this responsibility permanently, beyond political cycles or shifting priorities. It would ensure housing is treated as essential infrastructure, not a discretionary line item. It is time for Victoria to lead the way, and I call on the Premier to act to enshrine the right to housing in the charter and to guarantee that no Victorian is left without a place to call home.

Laverton electorate schools

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:18): (1188) My adjournment is for the Deputy Premier as Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the Department of Education brief Wyndham City Council on the many ways in which our Labor government have built, upgraded and continue to support our Wyndham schools, specifically in Truganina. I am so proud to say we have great local schools in Wyndham. We have built more than 20 in the past eight years alone, more than anywhere else in the state of Victoria. I firmly believe that it is so important that students and parents feel a sense of pride in their school and in their school community, which will essentially help them raise their children into the young adults that they will soon become.

I have seen schools like Dohertys Creek, Garrang Wilam and Bemin Secondary College – the first ever high school in Truganina – go from empty paddocks to thriving school communities thanks to the outstanding work of our local principals. I have worked closely with local principals at schools like Truganina P–9 and Dohertys Creek – fantastic principals like Jo from Bemin Secondary College and Tami-Jo at Dohertys Creek. They work tirelessly to give our kids the best education and the best opportunities possible. It is why I am the first one to have the backs of our principals and the first one to advocate for more funding, more facilities and more playgrounds – the list goes on and on. It is why I am so proud and I keep talking about the $37 million we have just recently announced for stage 2 at Bemin Secondary College.

But, sadly, not all elected officials, notably Wyndham city councillors, understand the importance of supporting our schools and our school communities. Recently, two Wyndham city councillors have been involved in spreading misinformation across my local community, across social media and across WhatsApp groups about a couple of great local schools in Truganina. I have spoken to parents about this misinformation, of their extreme disappointment, and members of our community see through it because they live it. Just like we teach our children at school of respectful relationships, I would like councillors to conduct themselves in respectful ways with their school council presidents – who are volunteers – principals and all other members of our community. I am thankful for the people who stick up for our great school communities, like school council presidents, and who call out disrespectful conduct. I will keep supporting our great volunteers, our educators and all those in our community who strive to make it a wonderful place to live and raise a family.

This is why I am seeking that the Minister for Education ask the Department of Education to provide a briefing to Wyndham City Council and its councillors about schools in Wyndham and in particular in Truganina. Spreading misinformation on social media is never okay. Students know it, and as parents we know it too. I am sure that this briefing will provide the facts. It will provide the data all councillors need to properly understand the state of play when it comes to schools in my local community.

Patient transport

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:21): (1189) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Health. The action I seek is a commitment to urgently reform Victoria's non-emergency patient transport system and the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme so regional patients can access life-saving treatment without financial or logistical hardship. Right now the system is failing. The government's changes to non-emergency patient transport, combined with a broken VPTAS system, are leaving regional Victorians behind, especially those who rely on regular medical treatments like renal dialysis. A government-commissioned review confirmed what my electorate already know: the system does not meet our patients' needs. We need change that improves access, makes the system more efficient and better supports both patients and our workforce. But when you look at that review, it is clear regional services were barely consulted. Independent analysis into costs and feasibility was ignored entirely. Decisions are being made in Melbourne offices with very little understanding of what this means for regional Victoria.

Since demand rose by 25 per cent in 2019, Ambulance Victoria tightened eligibility criteria. Non-emergency patient transport is now only available for those needing active clinical supervision during travel. There is a consequence to this. It might work in the city, where patients have other transport options, but for regional patients this is absolutely devastating. Many could access subsidised taxi travel previously. Now they are told they no longer qualify and are left to make their own arrangements – people like June Howard in Benalla, who needs dialysis three times a week. In towns like Devenish and Heathcote there is simply no public transport at all. Ambulance Victoria will not take them. Taxis are not covered and many are missing appointments or going without treatment entirely.

For those who think VPTAS will step in, it absolutely will not. The scheme is plagued by delays, bureaucracy and poor communication. Patients like Trevor Willmott have been waiting eight months for reimbursement – eight months, during a cost-of-living crisis. Many are hundreds of dollars out of pocket, and some cannot even get through to VPTAS on the phone or by email. When the cost of living keeps rising, expecting patients to cover these huge up-front costs and wait months to be reimbursed is simply impossible. It is not a bureaucratic failure, it is a moral one.

On top of this is the outdated 100-kilometre travel rule, which locks out patients in places like Benalla simply because the nearest hospital falls just short of the distance threshold. These families are being disqualified based on a technicality, even when the services they need are not available locally. For patients needing multiple treatments each week the financial and emotional strain is overwhelming. These are real people – patients trying to get treatment. The Allan Labor government cannot keep ignoring this. Stop abandoning regional patients on the side of the road.

South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:24): (1190) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me to visit the South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council in Springvale South in my electorate. The South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council, SEMVAC as they are affectionately known, do so much for families across Clarinda and across the south-east suburbs, supporting locals with housing, finding work, health, medical services and so much more. They are an important asset to many of the families, and they provide an important place where people can come together. That is why I was very proud to see that this budget invests $80,000 to support SEMVAC's work. It is a fantastic result for our local community, and the announcement was timely. It was actually leading to National Volunteer

Week when I learned about this wonderful commitment, and it was a pleasure to join together with some of my colleagues at Burden Park with SEMVAC to celebrate their many volunteers.

SEMVAC is such a wonderful example of the power of volunteers and bringing people together and connecting community. We are so lucky to have so many of them in our community, and we are a stronger and happier community because of them, along with all the other amazing local community organisations that deliver services and foster community engagement, connection and belonging. Thank you to SEMVAC and to all our volunteer organisations for the incredible impact they have in building our thriving and inclusive community in Clarinda and across the south-east. Congratulations to Dr Kimson Vu, Cr Loi Truong, Cr Alice Phuong Le and all of SEMVAC's amazing volunteers, who give so much of their time and energy to support our community and those that need assistance. SEMVAC plays a vital role in strengthening our community, supporting families, celebrating culture and providing essential services. Thank you to the minister. I am looking forward to hearing more on this important commitment.

Responses

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (19:26): The member for Bulleen raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action the member seeks is that the minister provide an update on the Timber Ridge Reserve in Doncaster.

The member for Kororoit raised a matter for me as the Minister for Small Business, and I am delighted to respond. First of all, it was an absolute pleasure to meet the many businesses, together with the member, from Deer Park to Caroline Springs and attend a business forum with women who were absolutely an inspiration and, quite frankly, were doing so much for their local communities but also for their local economy as well. By providing jobs and services, our small businesses are the engine rooms of our local communities, and I will be delighted to provide more information on the support that is available for our small businesses in Victoria for the member as soon as I can.

In relation to the member for Mildura, a matter was raised for the attention for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action the member seeks is that the minister provide an update on drought relief for farmers in the Mallee region. The member for Bellarine raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action the member seeks is that the minister provide an update on how the bus review will support the Bellarine community. The member for Prahran raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action the member seeks is to request the minister review the decision regarding the enrolment of Virtual School Victoria. The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is an update on the next steps for the Newland Street exit upgrade in Altona Meadows.

The member for Ringwood raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action the member seeks is that the Premier amend the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 to recognise housing as a human right. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action the member seeks is that the minister ask the Department of Education to provide an update to Wyndham City Council on school upgrades and investment in education. The member for Euroa raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health, and the action the member seeks is that the minister reform the emergency transport scheme. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to join the member in visiting the South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council and see firsthand the great work of the volunteers in his electorate. I will refer the matters raised to the relevant ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:29 pm.