



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 30 November 2023

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Christine Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Paul Hamer, Michaela Settle, Meng Heang Tak and Jackson Taylor

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Peter Walsh

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

**Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament**

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ²	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	South Barwon	ALP	O'Keefe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleland, 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 ³	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Fowles, Will ¹	Ringwood	Ind	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Home, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Werner, Nicole ⁴	Warrandyte	Lib
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Wayne Farnham	Narracan	Lib	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
			Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ ALP until 5 August 2023

² Resigned 27 September 2023

³ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁴ Elected 3 October 2023

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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Thursday 30 November 2023

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

*Business of the house***Notices of motion**

The SPEAKER (09:34): General business, notice of motion 13, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing the matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

*Committees***Integrity and Oversight Committee**

Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Independent Performance Audit of the Victorian Ombudsman

Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2021/22

Tim READ (Brunswick) (09:34): I have the honour to present to the house two reports from the Integrity and Oversight Committee: *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2021/22*, together with an appendix and transcripts of evidence; and *Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Independent Performance Audit of the Victorian Ombudsman*, together with an appendix.

Ordered that reports and appendices be published.

*Documents***Children's Court of Victoria****County Court of Victoria****Supreme Court of Victoria**

Report 2022–23

The Clerk: I have received for presentation by command of the Governor the Children's Court of Victoria report 2022–23, the County Court of Victoria report 2022–23 and the Supreme Court of Victoria report 2022–23.

Tabled.

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Ambulance Victoria – Report 2022–23

Auditor-General:

Fair Presentation of Service Delivery Performance 2023 – Ordered to be published

Major Projects Performance Reporting 2023 – Ordered to be published

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria – Victorian State of the Environment – Report 2023 (three documents)

Emerald Tourist Railway Board – Report 2022–23

Falls Creek Alpine Resort Management Board – Report 2022

Families, Fairness and Housing, Department of – Report 2022–23 (*replacement for copy tabled on Wednesday 1 November 2023*)

Financial Management Act 1994:

Reports from the Minister for Planning that she had received the reports 2022–23 of the:

Heritage Council of Victoria

Surveyors Registration Board of Victoria

Reports from the Minister for Environment that he had received the reports 2022 – 23 of the:

Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board

Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Board

Local Jobs First – Report 2022–23

Mental Health Complaints Commissioner – Report 2022–23

Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority – Report 2022–23

Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board – Report 2022

Mount Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board – Report 2022

Police Informants Royal Commission Implementation Monitor Act 2021 – Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants: Progress Report 2022–23

Portland District Health – Report 2022–23 (*replacement for copy tabled on Thursday 16 November 2023*)

Sentencing Advisory Council – Report 2022–23

Southern Alpine Resort Management Board – Report 2022

Spent Convictions Act 2021 – Review of the operation of the Act under s 25

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Building Act 1993 – SR 122

Gambling Regulation Act 2003 – SR 121

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Water Act 1989*:

Declaration of Rationing Areas in Declared Water Systems 2023

Ministerial Prohibition Determination Applicable to Particular Place of Take Approvals that are Tagged – November 2023

Ministerial Rules for Managing General Place of Take Approvals

Water Trading Rules for Declared Water Systems 2023

Victims of Crime Commissioner – Report 2022–23

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission – Report 2022–23 – Ordered to be published

Victorian Fisheries Authority – Report 2022–23

Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine – Report 2022–23

Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner – Report 2022–23 – Ordered to be published

Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Services – Report 2022–23

Victorian Professional Standards Council – Report 2022–23

Business of the house

Victorian Ombudsman

Performance audit

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That:

- (1) in accordance with s 24D(1) of the Ombudsman Act 1973, the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly appoint O'Connor Marsden & Associates Pty Ltd ('O'Connor Marsden'):
 - (a) to conduct the performance audit of the Victorian Ombudsman;
 - (b) in accordance with the Agreement for the provision of services for the performance audit of the Victorian Ombudsman;

MOTIONS

- (c) at the fixed-fee level of remuneration of \$231,000 (including GST) to be paid upon completion of the following:
 - (i) \$46,200 (including GST) upon Parliament's acceptance of O'Connor Marsden's audit plan, representing 20 per cent of the total fee;
 - (ii) \$69,300 (including GST) upon Parliament's acceptance of O'Connor Marsden's progress report, representing 30 per cent of the total fee;
 - (iii) \$115,500 (including GST) upon Parliament's acceptance of the final draft report, representing 50 per cent of the total fee;
- (2) a message be sent to the Legislative Council requesting their agreement.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Member conduct

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:38): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Richmond for intimidating loved ones of those killed and taken hostage by Hamas and for her involvement in the protest that shut down this house, demonstrating her complete contempt for the Victorian Parliament and the Victorian people.

Leave refused.

Middle East conflict

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:39): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house calls for:

- (a) an end to the indiscriminate bombing of Palestinian people;
- (b) an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine; and
- (c) the Victorian government to end military, economic, political and diplomatic ties with the Israeli government until it complies with its obligations under international law.

Leave refused.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, in the last sitting week I raised concerns about the house and the Council being shut down and the involvement of one member. I understand from advice from department officers that an investigation has been underway into whether members of this place have signed in people in relation to those protests. Firstly, I would appreciate an update on whether members were involved, and secondly, I am deeply concerned that we are now having behaviour coming from members of this place that is outrageous. It is causing deep distress. People have come to this country to seek friendship after their families have been killed and members of their family have been held hostage, and there are members of this place who have caused them distress. It is absolutely outrageous, and in my view it incited the behaviour that occurred last night, where those people were blocked from getting into their hotel rooms. I beseech you. I do not want this to be political. We are willing to work with the government on whatever it takes to take action, because we cannot allow this behaviour to occur in this Parliament. Please, we must do something. We cannot allow the behaviour that is occurring in this place to occur – to turn our backs on people who have come to this country seeking friendship.

The SPEAKER: On the point of order, Manager of Opposition Business, no complaints have come across my desk in relation to the matters that you have raised. Therefore it is not a matter for the Speaker at this point, it is a matter for the house.

*Members statements***Felicitations**

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:42): I want to join particularly my friend the Leader of the Opposition to thank all those in my electorate that have done such a wonderful job over the last 12 months: the volunteers that turn up to our fires, the ambulance officers in Beaconsfield who turn out to emergencies, the SES and those that are working at our neighbourhood houses, particularly down at Brentwood Park Neighbourhood House. We want to wish them all a merry Christmas. Some of the things that our neighbourhood houses have done the Greens could learn a lot from. Neighbourhood houses are all about inclusivity, making sure every person in our community feels welcome and none of them are intimidated. We want to make sure that that is the community that we support and build. Whilst we do not always agree with what happens across the aisle here and we do not always get along with every decision that happens here, the one thing I will say is that we all agree on one thing: we have got so many people in our community who continuously give back.

I know the member for Mordialloc, who has got a smile on his face now, came from down my way as well. Berwick is one of the most wonderful places to live because of the people in our community. I also know the member for Pakenham has volunteered up at Upper Beaconsfield with the CFA. It is people in this house and it is people in our community that make it absolutely wonderful and a great place to live. To every single one of them out in my electorate – the schools, everyone – I want to say: have a fantastic Christmas. Please be safe on the roads this Christmas. It is so important, probably more important than ever. To the staff in my office, can I say: thank you very much for everything you have done to support my community and to make it a better place to live for everyone in the Berwick area.

Father Gerard Dowling

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (09:44): I rise to pay tribute to Father Gerard Dowling OAM DE, a Catholic priest with the Archdiocese of Melbourne for 65 years and the official historian of the North Melbourne Football Club. I saw Father Gerry only recently at St Martin de Porres in Avondale Heights for their 60th anniversary. He was born in Essendon, the twin of Mary Simpson, in 1932. He studied at my old school as well – St Bernard’s College, Essendon – before moving to St Patrick’s College in Ballarat. He was ordained as a priest in 1958, and he rose to become dean of St Patrick’s Cathedral in Melbourne. He received a Medal of the Order of Australia in 1985, and perhaps he is best known as host of *The Family Counsellor*, which he did for over 50 years. Vale, Gerard Dowling.

Kaye Gauci

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (09:45): I also want to pay tribute to Kaye Veronica Gauci, former principal of Glenroy West Primary School. She epitomised service above self – 20 years as principal at Glenroy West Primary and over 20 years dedicated service to the Broadmeadows Rotary, twice the recipient of the Paul Harris Fellow recognition. She was admired, respected, much loved and greatly missed. To husband Arthur and son Anthony, my very sincere condolences. It was very fitting for me as Minister for Education to be with her family and my family too, who knew Kaye very well, when we farewelled her at the members bar at Flemington Racecourse last Wednesday, 22 November. Gone but not forgotten. Vale, Kaye Veronica Gauci.

Gippsland East homelessness

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:45): I want to bring the attention of the Minister for Housing and also the house the serious homelessness problem that is emerging in townships like Lakes Entrance in East Gippsland. A large part of the problem is that in towns like that the Big Housing Build just has not delivered. Since 2017 we have got two less social housing homes in my region, three less in Wellington and 32 less in Latrobe. In our area more are being sold off or decommissioned than are

being built. In Lakes Entrance we already have had five small homeless camps developed, and in addition we have a large cohort who have been accessing cheap rentals at tourist accommodation, and they have been asked to leave by tomorrow. On 1 December they are out; that is going to add to the problem. The government needs to do more on the ground, and there are two places to start. The first is to work with local councils to provide showers and toilets at locations at the very least. Secondly, let us better fund the frontline agencies that deal with this homelessness situation on a day-to-day basis. Homelessness is increasing, and it is going to get worse as of tomorrow, when these people are moved out of their holiday accommodation. A start would be to stop selling off and decommissioning our homes at the rate that we are building new ones, as that does not deliver a net gain.

Family violence

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:47): I rise today to mark the commencement of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence. As representatives of our communities we must champion the cause of justice, equality and the eradication of violence in all its forms, particularly violence that is rooted in gender-based discrimination. The Counting Dead Women Australia project devastatingly reports that as of 27 November 56 women have been killed by violence this year. Our collective responsibility for the elimination of gendered violence and to hold perpetrators to account extends into every corner of our society. In Victoria the Allan Labor government is staunch in its work on and commitment to ending family violence. This includes supporting organisations that are working to prevent family violence, as well as those providing support to victim-survivors. These organisations inspire us to be bigger, bolder and braver in all that we do every day. In my electorate of Macedon I want to thank the following services: the Centre for Non-Violence, central Victoria Centre Against Sexual Assault, Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health, the Orange Door, our local police, Women’s Health Loddon Mallee and all of our healthcare workers. I also want to pay tribute to the incredible women of the Zonta Club of Kyneton for their ongoing commitment to breaking the silence around family violence in regional Victoria through their steadfast support for the campaign.

Country Fire Authority Evelyn electorate brigades

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:48): Prestigious Country Fire Authority honours and awards have been bestowed upon many local volunteer firefighters in our community recently. The rare and prestigious Unit Citation for Service was awarded to members of the Mooroolbark fire brigade and Chimside Park fire brigade for their courage in going above the call of duty at an exceptionally challenging Mooroolbark house fire on 5 May 2022, a confronting and traumatic scene, with a mother and children unconscious in separate rooms and a roof caving in. Intricate skills were displayed by brigade members in a distressing situation. Working together with FRV station 26, the rapid response led to the two children being resuscitated and taken to safety. I pay tribute to members from Mooroolbark fire brigade, captain Mark Drennan, former captain Tony King, Daniel King, Ashleigh Bowen, Bruce Allen, Katherine Heinz, Jackson Evans, Marcel Jasper, Nigel Jones, Dave Kells, Barry Roberts, Paul Williamson and Kris Linley; and from Chimside Park fire brigade, captain Ben Cash, Angela Fleay, James Gammell, Kurt Pukownik and Neil Thompson. Alongside chief officer Jason Heffernan at the Mooroolbark fire station we congratulated these firefighters for their exceptional service. Also the prestigious CFA Outstanding Service Medal was bestowed upon Robert Bethell, former captain of Coldstream fire brigade, for exceptional service throughout his long and distinguished volunteer firefighting service. All of these CFA members epitomise the spirit of the CFA at the highest level and are true heroes.

Police casualties

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:50): Today we remember Brevet Sergeant Jason Doig, 53, a member of the South Australia Police service, who was shot and died in the line of duty in recent weeks, despite the efforts of fellow officers and paramedics to save him. We wish a full recovery for Sergeant Michael

Hutchinson, who also received gunshot wounds responding to the same incident. The Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police visited the family of Brevet Sergeant Doig, who live in country Victoria, to offer his condolences and the support of Victoria Police at this time. Sadly, across Australia four police officers have lost their lives in the line of duty in the past 12 months: two in Queensland, one in Western Australia and one in South Australia. In the midst of providing leadership and comfort to his own police service, South Australia Commissioner of Police Grant Stevens and his family are mourning the loss of their son Charlie, a road toll victim. Last week the Police Ministers Council convened. It was a sombre meeting, and time was taken to reflect on these tragic losses of life across the country, in particular in South Australia. We will redouble our efforts across the country to support our police services and to keep communities safe.

Middle East conflict

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:51): Further, I am also aware of the incident and the attendance of pro-Palestinian protesters who loitered in the lobby of the Crowne Plaza wearing masks and intimidating guests at the hotel, particularly Israeli families who have hostages in the Middle East conflict. Those matters are still under investigation.

Woodworkers of the Southern Peninsula

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:51): I was delighted last week to head down to the Woodworkers of the Southern Peninsula and meet with their toy coordinator Gaven Davis. With the cost-of-living crisis, the volunteer toy makers down there over the last few months have prepared more than 400 toys to go to support groups so that families in need and kids that may not have had a Christmas present under the tree this Christmas will have something to open. The work that they do is incredible and the toys that they have produced are amazing. I thank Gaven and everybody down there at the Woodworkers for what they have done, and I am so proud. The spirit they show is what makes me proud to be able to represent the people of Nepean, and they are a real credit to the rest of the community.

Rosebud Community Garden

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:52): I was also pleased recently to be invited down to the Rosebud Community Garden. They had a scarecrow judging competition that they invited my twin boys, Mason and Parker, down to judge. President Tom invited us down, and Mrs Pearl – which was made by the secretary Jenni – was judged the best scarecrow of the day by the boys. Thank you to the team there at the Rosebud Community Garden for everything they do.

Nepean Shield

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:53): Finally, I just want to honour two students who were awarded the Nepean Shield: one at Rye Primary School, Molly Waterson, a grade 5 student; and a grade 2 student at Red Hill Consolidated School, Remi Justice. Congratulations to both of them. I wish everybody else in Nepean a very merry Christmas.

Williamstown North Primary School

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:53): Over the last few weeks there has been some amazing stuff happening in and around Williamstown. Firstly, Loud Shirt Day was marked at Williamstown North Primary School last month, with students and teachers coming together in their loudest T-shirts to support fellow student Natalija. It was Natalija's brother who asked me along to support his sister in a day of raising awareness and funds for NextSense, an organisation dedicated to supporting children with hearing loss. It was great to see Natalija being supported by the whole school community.

Hobsons Bay Community Fund

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:53): Community spirit was celebrated at Hobsons Bay Community Fund’s thankyou event last Wednesday. The Hobsons Bay Community Fund strives to make our community vibrant, inclusive and fair, and it has provided over \$300,000 in grants to grassroots organisations. It was wonderful to gather together and recognise the great work that is being done in our community. Thank you to Hobsons Bay Community Fund for a wonderful evening and for all the work you do.

Inner West Art Fair

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:54): Finally, Newport’s Substation was abuzz last Friday at the opening of the Inner West Art Fair. Over 30 artists had their work on display. The festivities and appreciation of art continued all through the weekend. Thank you to Julia and the team for inviting me along, and congratulations on the really successful art fair.

Felicitations

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:54): Finally, in conclusion, I would like to give a shout-out to my wonderful electorate office staff, at the end of this year, who have spent this year servicing our community, working incredibly hard and making Williamstown the best place, in my view, to live.

Ambulance response times

Kim O’KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:54): In the house this week we have heard of many alarming incidents in regard to the ambulance response crisis, including the 20 lives that have been lost in Victoria this past 12 months, and my thoughts are with all of those families. Last week a number of alarming incidents were brought to my attention by a Nathalia resident. Severe diabetic 83-year-old Patricia was being visited by the district nurse, who assessed that she needed an ambulance. A neighbour who sat with Patricia, which was a 3-hour wait for the ambulance, felt extremely concerned as Patricia was so unwell. He said to wait 3 hours was shocking and distressful. He spoke of another incident where a gentleman collapsed with a suspected heart attack and had to wait 55 minutes, and another just this week of a gentleman who had a fall, breaking his ribs, and had to wait in pain for over 1 hour.

In speaking to Ambulance Victoria last week and discussing Nathalia’s concerns they said they are doing the best that they can with the resources they have. This is in no way a reflection on our hardworking and wonderful paramedics. This is a lack of resources in a system that is clearly broken and not working. The people of Nathalia feel so concerned and disconnected from medical health support. They are also struggling to get doctors appointments, and there is no doctor on call after 5 pm. In question time yesterday in relation to the ambulance delays the Minister for Health said we will do better. We need immediate action to address the health crisis and to support our local communities to ensure our ambulance services are able to meet their performance targets and keep our communities safe and that patients have access to the health care that they need before more lives are lost.

Premier’s Spirit of Anzac Prize

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:56): Congratulations to Mount Ridley College student Baylasan Almosa for being a recipient of the 2023 Premier’s Spirit of Anzac prize. This competition provides students in years 9 to 12 with an opportunity to explore Australia’s wartime and peacekeeping history and its relevance to developing our diverse and multicultural society. As part of her application Baylasan recorded a video of herself making Anzac biscuits while reflecting on the Gallipoli campaign and

discussing its significant contribution in creating Australia's identity. Baylasan will now have the opportunity to tour war memorials, battlefields and commemorative sites in Türkiye, including Gallipoli. Congratulations again to Baylasan and the 11 other recipients, who have done a fantastic job in reflecting on the service and sacrifice of our veterans.

Kalkallo Youth Advisory Council

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:57): As this year draws to a close, I would also like to thank my Kalkallo Youth Advisory Council for all the work they have done in 2023. This year members focused on the issue of career development and life skills, creating a flyer that acts as a directory to helpful resources via a QR code, which they plan to distribute to secondary schools over the coming weeks. Thanks to Aarav, Ammar, Anagha, Ashly, Caitlyn, Divjot, Harkirat, Helena, Husain, Jayde, Kayla, Lorjel, Maria, Matthew, Mehar, Nathaniel, Nayush, Omar, Priyanshi, Sarah and Uthish. I thank all of these members for the work they have done, and I look forward to many of them returning next year on the council, as have many returned from last year.

Mount Eliza Secondary College

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (09:57): Mount Eliza Secondary College students Chelsea Rix and James Richards lodged a petition in July sponsored by the then Shadow Minister for Education Matt Bach that has gained 843 signatures calling on the Labor government to urgently redevelop their 50-year-old school. The petition was tabled and presented by Matt Bach in the Council on Tuesday. I have been tirelessly advocating for the Labor government to redevelop Mount Eliza Secondary – in my maiden speech and in speeches to Parliament, to ministers and more. This must include a school master plan; a flexible learning centre; safety fixtures; upgrades to home economics, drama and STEM facilities; and more. The Liberals and Nationals opposition committed \$2.5 million for the college if elected, but state Labor never matched this and continue to ignore this need, forcing school students to instigate a petition. I again call on the government to redevelop this school.

Baxter rail extension

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (09:58): The Albanese federal Labor government cruelly dumped the Frankston to Baxter rail extension – a project I have been fighting for for years, getting \$3 million in 2016 and \$225 million towards building it in 2018, the first funding since the project was called for 100 years ago. After their 90-day review the Albanese Labor government shamefully scrapped the \$225 million altogether after in 2019 saying they would deliver it if elected and deliver it sooner. And shame on the state Labor government, who have never supported the project. This would have meant new and upgraded train stations at Frankston East near the hospital and uni, Langwarrin and Baxter. It was close to park-and-ride and bus services for the whole peninsula. There are no train services in my electorate, and due to Labor it looks like that will remain so for a long time to come.

Support Act

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:59): Today is Ausmusic T-shirt Day, when we celebrate our world-famous music industry, but more importantly today is about raising awareness and money for music charity Support Act. I had the pleasure this week of announcing that the Allan Labor government had delivered on the promise that it made to Victorians at last year's election with a \$2 million commitment for this impactful organisation. Support Act provides access to vital mental health, wellbeing and crisis services. While local music brings joy to millions of Australians, working in the industry can be really tough. Late hours, time away from home and insecure work can lead to stress and financial hardship. These factors can take a toll. Research shows music industry workers have four times the rate of psychological distress of the general population, and that is where Support Act steps in, helping music workers when they need it most. Support Act provides short-term financial support, access to mental

health and wellbeing programs, dedicated programs for First Nations music workers and vital services like a free 24/7 helpline.

Today is about much more than wearing a T-shirt. It is about recognising the role that music plays in all our lives, and for this government it is about working with the industry to ensure that funding is directed to areas that need it most. Our \$2 million in funding will enable Support Act to continue to provide its important programs and services to musicians, crew and other industry workers here in Victoria for the next four years. In 2019 the then Andrews government was the first government in the country to provide funding support to Support Act, and we encourage all music fans to get on board and donate to Support Act to celebrate Ausmusic T-shirt Day.

Rowville electorate roads

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:00): When I saw the funding allocated for Wellington Road, I was in disbelief at how little they could allocate for such a crucial road; yet, as Labor continue to do, they have underwhelmed expectations. Napoleon Road has only been allocated a pathetic \$445,000. In comparison, Labor spent more on one executive for the botched Commonwealth Games in one year than they would have allocated in nine years for Napoleon Road. Instead of doing what matters, Labor is barely doing what is expected. Of the \$445,000 that has been allocated since 2014, Labor has only spent \$198,000 on the road, not even managing to deliver half of the funding allocated. The Labor Party in Victoria is not the party that could but the party that could not – could not deliver the Commonwealth Games, could not deliver the airport rail loop, could not deliver local roads for locals.

Remembrance Day

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (10:01): This year our Remembrance Day service at the Montmorency Eltham RSL was quite special, with the important involvement of confident and articulate local students participating throughout the service, soberly remembering the tragedy of war while talking of the hope that peace brings. I congratulate the Montmorency Eltham RSL for this important inclusion of young people. Thank you also to Olivia and Matteo from Holy Trinity Primary for their acknowledgement of country; Mila and Cedric from Briar Hill Primary for their acknowledgement of service; Owen from St Francis Xavier Primary, who led the prayer, and his fellow students who laid poppies on the Remembrance Day plaque; Olivia from Eltham North Primary, who read the ode; the talented bugler from Eltham College, Ijsbrand; Elgin and Owen from Sherbourne Primary for their beautiful singing of the national anthem; and Ryder from Eltham East Primary for his exceptional speech on the importance of peace and the sadness of war.

I thank the Diamond Creek RSL for their Remembrance Day service involving students from local primary schools laying wreaths and poppies at the cenotaph. The Remembrance Day service at Kangaroo Ground war memorial park was a lovely service as always with the poem read by students from Kangaroo Ground Primary and important historical context given by Terry Phillips. Thank you to the friends of Kangaroo Ground war memorial park for your support of this service.

Eltham electorate men's sheds

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (10:03): We had another beautiful sunny and fun day at my annual men's shed barbecue with the Eltham and Diamond Creek men's sheds alongside Kate Thwaites MP and Rob Mitchell MP. It gave Kate, Rob and me a chance to share food and drink and conversation with our men's sheds and thank them for the fantastic work they do in our community. Our men's sheds do important work in our communities promoting and supporting mental health, strong community engagement, knowledge and a supportive social space, and many activities happen in our community thanks to the support of men's sheds, and Kate, Rob and I thank them.

Housing affordability

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (10:03): When residents in my electorate moved into a build-to-rent development in Kerr Street, Fitzroy, they thought they would be there for years. And why wouldn't they? Labor touts build-to-rent as the stable solution in the rental crisis, as though somehow corporate landlords would act more ethically than individuals. In fact this government love build-to-rent so much that they give developers a 50 per cent land tax break for 30 years and a full exemption from the absentee owner surcharge. But a year since Kerr Street residents moved in, a third of them have either been told to leave for no reason or received rent increases of up to 17 per cent.

Build-to-rent is a classic example of Labor using the housing crisis to funnel public money into developers' hands when they know that the solution is to regulate the industry and make unlimited rent increases illegal. Until they do, build-to-rent landlords can kick tenants out and raise the rent by however much they like, just like other landlords. The rental inquiry showed that the overwhelming majority of housing experts, organisations and service providers recommended rent controls and stronger protections for renters. Without urgent action, every unfair eviction, every retaliatory rent increase and every meal a renter skips to pay for rent will be on Labor's hands.

Middle East conflict

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:04): Last week the Minister for Multicultural Affairs joined me in meeting with local mosque leaders in Dandenong. We were also joined by my federal colleague Julian Hill as well as the member for Narre Warren North and Lee Tarlamis in the other place. Leaders from the Emir Sultan Mosque, Omar Farooq Mosque and the Hallam mosque as well as the Victorian Afghan Associations Network spoke at length about the grief and pain currently being experienced by Australian Muslim communities as a consequence of the war in Gaza. We reflected on the appalling loss of civilian life in this conflict, including an estimated 6000 Palestinian children. We all agreed that the loss of civilian life, whether Israeli or Palestinian, is devastating and abhorrent – no question.

These are sensitive matters, and our priority as state MPs must always be to preserve the successful multiculturalism we enjoy here in Victoria. We must always seek to promote social cohesion, which is why of course as a representative of one of the largest Muslim communities in our state, it caused me some concern to hear local leaders talk of feeling sidelined and sometimes unable to publicly grieve. I want to put on record my deep grief for the loss of civilian life in this conflict, especially of the thousands of innocent children. I know this conflict long predates the awful, awful events of 7 October, but the scale of loss in this later chapter is clearly horrific for all of us. To my local Muslim leaders and the communities you serve: I hear you and my heart goes out to you. I also want to thank you for engaging in such a respectful dialogue.

Felicitations

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:06): On the last sitting day of Parliament for 2023 I wish to take the opportunity to thank my community for the opportunity to represent them in this place. It is a great honour and privilege that I never take for granted. I wish to thank my extraordinary electorate office staff: Michelle Kerr, Matt Burns and Christy Bell, as well as Jacob Kaye and Matt Deeks, who joined us earlier in the year. No matter how hectic this job is, it is always so reassuring to return to the office, have a cup of tea and a singalong to a rock anthem on 3BA. I am so grateful for your hard work, your excellent humour and your big hearts.

I would also like to thank our principals, teachers and school support staff for their outstanding efforts across the year supporting students and wish them a great break over the school holidays. I would also like to thank our first responders for the job they do looking after our community and keeping us safe and out of harm's way. I would particularly like to thank everyone who works over the festive season. While many of us enjoy a break with our families and friends, you are on shift, turning up day and

night to look after us. It is also a very busy time for our retail workers, and they deserve to be treated with respect always.

On Christmas shopping, we have many wonderful businesses and makers right across Ballarat, so please support local when making your Christmas list. It is a gift that keeps giving. Finally, please drive safely this Christmas and over the summer holidays. Wishing you happiness, peace and joy.

Narre Warren North electorate achievements

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:08): It has officially been a year since I was elected as the member for Narre Warren North and when Victoria resoundingly re-elected a Labor government for a third term – and what a year it has been. It is an absolute honour to represent my community of Narre Warren North in state Parliament, and I am so proud of what we have achieved. We have had significant investment in our local schools, and I am very excited to report that a \$24.2 million expansion of Hallam Secondary College is well underway, as well as – how can I forget – the level crossing removal at Webb Street. The boom gates are gone, the old station has been demolished and we are on track for an opening in 2024. It has been amazing to work alongside all the sports clubs, multicultural groups, senior clubs, schools and charities to deliver what matters for our community.

I want to say a huge shout-out to everyone that has supported me in the first year, many of them in this chamber now, and especially to my electorate office. To Millie, Matt, Moz, Noel, Marni and Josh, thank you for everything that you do. To my family, my three greatest achievements Bridie, Kane and Ned, thank you for the support and love that you give me. It is not always easy being a child of an MP, and your love and support is everything to me. It has been an incredible year for this government. I cannot wait for Parliament next year to continue and to do what matters. Very quickly in my last moment, it is a very special birthday today. I want to say a very happy birthday to the member for Cranbourne, our whip. Have a happy birthday!

Clyde Primary School

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:09): A celebratory day at Clyde Primary with a massive upgrade complete – it is gold stars all round. With the Premier, Deputy Premier and Cranbourne MP, we were met by inspiring captains Dhiya, Jack, Cassidy and Aydin, who led us on an awe-filled tour, then on to the big special assembly in the big gym. Thank you, principal Michelle Mackenlay and your stellar team. To have gone through this major upgrade while running a school and classes is beyond remarkable. A big shout-out to all the students, families, builders, architects, and a collective yay to the foundation students Libby, Pragathi, Porsha, Anikya, Charlotte, Amelia, Siffat, Thomas, Dante and Flynn for sharing what they love about their school, accompanied by a visually stunning book of drawings.

Blind Bight Community Centre

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:10): Blind Bight Community Centre turned a fabulous 30, and what a celebration it was. Literally the whole town turned up, and so many more. The Marty Rose Band on the big truck rocked and got us grooving. Glorious weather, a fabulous array of activities and stalls galore were all showcasing the best of this community-at-heart coastal village town. A big cheer to president Ann Gallagher and all the committee members Louise, Gene, Troy and Chris; coordinator Leanne Craven and her awesome crew Neralie, Raelene, Leash and Trish; and the awesome volunteers, sponsors and supporters. Cassandra Fernando and I promise to rehearse and start singing in the same key Happy Birthday for the 2024 town 50th. A big thankyou to captains Nathan Thorp and Hans DeKraker and their members from the Devon Meadows and Warneet-Blind Bight fire brigade for holding a bushfire awareness – (*Time expired*)

Bushfire preparedness

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:11): Although the weather outside may tell a different story, the summer season is fast approaching, and across Victoria in my electorate of Monbulk this means the bushfire season is nearly upon us. Many people have moved into the hills area, so I would encourage all new residents as well as old to connect with their local CFA and, if they have not done so already, learn how to prepare their property and plan for a bushfire. Preparing properties before the season is declared and clearing debris such as leaf matter and undergrowth, which can dry out quickly and turn into tinder for fires, is vital. Please take the time to ensure your bushfire plan is ready, have your go bags packed and be clear with family and friends about the specifics of your evacuation plan. Know when to leave, where to go and how to get there safely, and remember to plan for pets, horses and other livestock too. And for those planning to travel through the beautiful Dandenong Ranges this summer, check the conditions for your destination and the areas you will pass through beforehand. Never venture into areas with a forecast catastrophic fire danger rating – please.

Professor Arnold Dix

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:11): On another matter, I would like to acknowledge local hero Professor Arnold Dix of Monbulk, who some of you may have read about this morning, who has worked alongside Indian rescuers to free the 41 workers who were trapped for 17 days after a landslide. Arnold would have to be one of the most intelligent and accomplished yet down-to-earth people I have had the pleasure to get to know. So, Arnold, thank you for all the good that you do. A safe journey home to Monbulk, back to your family and flowers.

Felicitations

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:12): Lastly, as the year draws to a close I would like to thank my wonderful electorate office staff Lorna, Kara, Sophie, Peter and John. All your hard work, support, good humour and kindness have made this year such a great one. I would like to thank my wonderful family Mike, Alex and Bella for supporting me – love you all to the moon, stars and back again.

Felicity Jouvelet

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:12): I would just like to congratulate Felicity Jouvelet, who has qualified for the Steve Hooker challenge at the Zatopek international championships and wish her all the best.

Felicitations

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:12): I also thank my amazing electorate office staff. Every day they serve the community. They never judge, they never ask how people vote – all they care about is doing what needs to be done.

Business of the house

Victorian Ombudsman

Performance audit

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:13): I have received the following message from the Legislative Council:

The Legislative Council inform the Legislative Assembly that they have agreed with the Assembly in the appointment of O'Connor Marsden & Associates Pty Ltd ('O'Connor Marsden') to conduct the performance audit of the Victorian Ombudsman.

*Bills***Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023****State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023***Concurrent debate*

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:13): I move:

That this house authorises and requires the Speaker to permit the second-reading and subsequent stages of the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 and the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 to be moved and debated concurrently.

The Allan Labor government is bringing back the SEC – and aren't we proud to be doing that. Can I say also that we very much look forward to not only concurrently debating this bill when next we return but also of course welcoming the new member for Mulgrave. And before the Manager of Opposition Business gets on his feet, let me say this: along with a range of other actions and commitments that our government is delivering, of course the member for Mulgrave went to the people of Mulgrave with this fantastic commitment of bringing back the SEC. Not only are we looking to do that through this legislation, which we are seeking the Speaker's agreement to enable us to debate concurrently, but we are already getting on and delivering the very important components of the SEC. In fact it was great to see that both the Premier and the Minister for the State Electricity Commission were out today turning the sod on Melbourne's renewable energy hub near Melton. What a fantastic initiative this is.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Leader of the House that this is a narrow procedural debate on the bringing together of the two bills. It will be of advantage to all of us if we stick to that procedural context.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Thank you very much for your guidance, Deputy Speaker. Obviously it is important, given the commitments that have been made to the Victorian people and their readiness and willingness to embrace our government's commitment to bringing back the SEC, that we introduce – well, we have already introduced them – and we debate in this house two bills that are going to enable us to establish the SEC. In fact I might point out to the house that, having sought advice from the clerks, it was recommended to us, or we were advised, that debating the two bills concurrently would enable members to be sure that they did not fall foul of the anticipation of debate rule in the house.

In fact what we are seeking to do is simply common sense. I have already taken the opportunity to advise the Manager of Opposition Business that both bills will be voted on separately, so it is scarcely a big deal. It is all about ensuring that we can get on and give everyone the opportunity. Particularly on this side of the house, I anticipate that there will not be a single member that does not want to get up and speak on these bills concurrently, because we are so excited to be able to deliver this fabulous commitment to the people of Victoria – people who I might say voted for the delivery of the SEC and, what is more, took the opportunity to vote again in the Mulgrave by-election for the SEC. We take this opportunity in this procedural debate to recognise that the new member for Mulgrave came first, not third, in the local by-election, and indeed –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the House is defying your ruling.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the House has strayed somewhat, and if she could come back, I would be appreciative.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Thank you very much again for your advice, Deputy Speaker, which I will endeavour to uphold. As I have already outlined, with these bills it is just common sense to debate them concurrently. There is no plausible reason why those on the other side would not agree with this. But nonetheless, they have done that, may I suggest, to be churlish rather than to work with the

Parliament in order to deliver on the commitments that have been endorsed by the people of Victoria. So rather than seeking to obstruct what our government is trying to achieve, I encourage the house to back this very simple procedural motion so that we can get on and deliver the SEC.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:18): I move:

That the words ', and that general business, notice of motion 79,' be inserted after the words 'State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023'.

Before I speak to the amendment, I note that the government has been so excited and so ready to debate the SEC bills that they gave notice that we would this week and then shelved them. That is how ready the government was. That is how urgent the government was to debate these bills. Notice was given, and that is what is at the heart of what is being proposed to this house – a readiness and a government ready to debate these bills. In fact the government proposed to do so and then shelved them – not for two weeks, for two months. Had the Parliament debated them this week, we would have –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, as you instructed me, this is a very narrow procedural debate about debating concurrently two bills that are before the house.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, it goes to the heart of the government's motion on the SEC bills and the style of debate that will occur – the debate processes around that very matter.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The procedural debate in front of us is regarding the bringing together of the two bills and now your amendment. I would appreciate it if you would keep the procedural debate to that.

James NEWBURY: In relation to the amendment and item 79: item 79, for the house's refresh, was:

That this house notes the importance of respecting the community and Parliament by transparently dealing with proposed bills and ... condemns the Minister for Energy and Resources for blatantly disregarding Victorians in the way she has refused to consult on the ...

State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 and the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023. I note, to assist the house, that the government and the minister have refused to provide any briefings on these two bills, despite, to assist the house, the secretary of the department contacting the minister, confirming that the department is ready, willing and able to provide a briefing on those bills. In relation to the amendment that I have moved, going to the very substance of that amendment, the department has provided advice that the minister has been advised by the department that they have been ready, willing and able to provide briefings on these bills, but the minister has chosen not to provide them. It is outrageous that a government would refuse after being advised by their own department that the department wanted to do so. How can the government stand here today and say that not only are they ready to deal with these bills – bills that they have shelved, bills that they are refusing to brief on, with two months delay – we now have to deal with those bills concurrently? Why has the government moved a motion to deal with those bills concurrently? It has nothing to do with anticipation. The government does not want to deal with these bills separately because they do not want to provide two opportunities for the house to deal with these issues and deal with them in their substance. That is why the government does not want to –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, once again, I think what we are seeing from the Manager of Opposition Business –

James NEWBURY: What is the point of order?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Without assistance, member for Brighton.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Thank you. Can I get it out, please?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, Leader of the House. Without assistance, member for Brighton.

Mary-Anne Thomas: The point of order is that the Manager of Opposition Business is misleading the house in the assumptions that he is making about the –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, Leader of the House.

James NEWBURY: The constant interjections are proof positive of how the government is trying to stop the opposition putting the point in terms of its opposition to what is being proposed. The clerks have not provided advice to the opposition that there is any requirement to debate the bills in this way, and we will be opposing it.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (10:23): I would like to make a contribution on the motion of the Leader of the House. I am slightly bemused at all of this outrage that we are seeking to debate two bills concurrently. The fact is: we have debated bills concurrently in the past. Every year when we debate the budget, we are debating bills concurrently. This should not be such a problem for those opposite. But those opposite do like to oppose – it is in their DNA. It is opposition for opposition's sake. Really, the people of Victoria have endorsed this government's agenda to bring back the SEC. In that election exactly one year ago, where we were returned in record numbers, the centrepiece of our election platform was reviving the SEC, which those opposite opposed. They are still trying to sabotage, frankly, this government's efforts to revive the SEC, and I guess, more to the point, this government's efforts to enshrine the SEC in the constitution so that the future Liberal government cannot get rid of it.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a procedural debate and the member is going nowhere near it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member to continue on the procedural debate, please.

Nick STAIKOS: Well, I am on the procedural debate. We are seeking to debate and consider these bills concurrently, and I think, as the Leader of the House also pointed out, no doubt there will be a lot of interest from all 88 members of this house in making a contribution on this legislation. Those on this side of the house are all going to get up to talk about how this government is investing in renewable energy, and no doubt those opposite will get up and talk about how their alternative is nuclear power. There is no doubt we will have that debate. We know that that is their alternative. I will tell you – on election day last year I was standing alongside my Liberal opponent at the largest booth in the Bentleigh electorate, the McKinnon Secondary College booth –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member is straying.

Nick STAIKOS: No, no – well, I am going to the heart of this debate, Deputy Speaker, and I am laying out the benefits for the opposition of actually considering these two bills concurrently. Certainly my opponent at that booth was talking up the merits of nuclear power that she saw, and she was telling voters as they were coming in that that is where we should be going with this. Labor won 66 per cent of the vote at that booth, I should point out, so that did not work. But this will be a good opportunity for those opposite to talk about their pet issue, and that is their alternative to this government's renewable energy agenda under the SEC.

It is timely that we consider this motion now, because – I do note the Premier is in the house – the Premier this morning turned the first sod on a fantastic project, the first project invested in by the SEC, and that is the Melbourne renewable energy hub over near Melton, which will store enough energy to power up to 200,000 homes during peak periods. It is a \$245 million investment by the SEC in the hub, which is a total project of \$1 billion. It will create 155 jobs, and it will also provide 1.6 gigawatts of energy storage, which is certainly leading us to this government's target of at least 2.6 gigawatts of storage by 2030.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member is debating the bills.

Nick STAIKOS: I am just so excited about this that I just cannot wait to debate it, Deputy Speaker. But, look, there is no problem with debating these bills concurrently.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is now.

Nick STAIKOS: There is precedent in this house for debating these bills concurrently. It is common sense, and no doubt all 88 of us will be absolutely desperate to speak on these bills, because one way or the other everybody is passionate about the SEC. We are passionate about bringing it back. We are showing the same passion about bringing it back that those opposite showed about selling it.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Selling it off.

Nick STAIKOS: Absolutely. So no doubt we will all bring passion to this debate when it is next comes around. There is absolutely no problem with debating these bills concurrently. Again, I hazard a guess that we are going to win this vote. It is just a waste of about half an hour of the Parliament's time.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (10:28): What arrogance are we hearing from across the chamber. I rise to oppose this motion, and to actually say that it is a waste of time to debate is absolutely extremely insulting to the people of this state. We are elected in this house to debate, to make sure we have looked at the pros and cons, to try and mitigate unintended consequences, and here we have an arrogant government – I do sort of toss up between arrogant and chaotic, but I think it is both. It clearly is both. Last week on the government business program two bills were put up for debate. On Sunday the government pulled those two bills.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on the point of relevance – the member for South-West Coast has been very vocal about calling points of order for this side of the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order is relevance.

Mary-Anne Thomas: My point of order is that –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order on relevance. The member was straying. Could the member come back to the procedural event.

Roma BRITNELL: I am more than happy to continue to speak about the merging of these two bills and inhibiting the capacity of the opposition to debate. The reality is that we would like to debate these two bills, because that is what was proposed to the house. On Sunday night those two bills were pulled. We as a Victorian community are waiting to see just how this promise is going to be delivered, of the SEC bringing down power bills, because what we are seeing is them rising – by 25 per cent for electricity and 30 per cent for gas – and the community are hurting. So debate should ensue and we should be questioning and making sure we do the scrutiny that is required on this.

We have a government here with all the hubris, conning the community. I think it is absolutely pulling the wool over Victorians' eyes, because there is no enshrining of any assets that we will actually have control over by the government – it is a concept. When we had the SEC in the past, let us remember who sold it: Joan Kirner was the –

Members interjecting.

Roma BRITNELL: She proposed the sale.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is a narrow procedural debate. The member has strayed from that, and she is misleading the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Leader of the House. The member had strayed into debating the bills. Please come back to the motion or the amendment.

Roma BRITNELL: I will come back to the fact that we had the opportunity taken away from us to debate the two bills, and now the proposal for them to be merged does detract from our capability

to really put under the spotlight the actual challenges that Victorians are facing with the higher cost of living and the price of energy under this government.

I think chaos is what is really reigning here. There were five or six attempts, I believe, to ask for a bill briefing, which is normal procedure. When a bill has been put to the house, you ask the minister for an understanding of the detail of the bill so it can be effectively debated. There were five or six requests, and refusal after refusal after refusal. What does that tell me about transparency? What does that tell me about clear and honest debate that should ensue? And now they want to truncate it into one debate so they can just shut it down. They can put all the hubris they like around it – print jackets, put hats on heads and produce jelly beans that say aren't we wonderful. People are hurting. The cost of living is killing families. The SEC is not bringing down power prices. It is a concept that they want to enshrine in the constitution. How is that going to help Victorians who are struggling to buy nappies, to buy formula, who are really struggling to pay their mortgage?

This is a debate that we should be absolutely having in this house. If the government is so intent on two bills –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, once again, it is a narrow procedural debate. The member is suggesting that the bills will not be debated. That is not what the motion is about. It is simply –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mary-Anne Thomas: concurrently debating –

Tim McCurdy interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Without assistance, member for Ovens Valley. Back to the procedural debate.

Roma BRITNELL: The minister has tried to waste as much time as possible, which is more of the lack of transparency. This government wants to have secrecy prevail and to stop proper discussion, debate and scrutiny. To take the two bills into one does exactly that. It harnesses anyone's opportunity; it does not help.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:33): I am pleased to contribute to this procedural debate. In doing so, I cannot help but comment on how yesterday we celebrated the 50–50 parity of women in this Parliament, and if there is something that women are famous for, it is multitasking. With this side of the chamber full –

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, based on what was said for the last number of speakers about this being a narrow procedural debate, I ask the relevance of the comments being made about a totally different subject.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order, but I encourage the member for Yan Yean to get to the procedural nature of the debate.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, for your guidance. The multitasking that women are capable of is important in this house for being able to debate two bills concurrently. I know that there were some concerns from the member for Brighton. He was concerned about what we were going to be debating and some mysterious backdating of media releases et cetera. What I am concerned about is that they want to take us even further back in time than –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, just on relevance, this is not an opportunity for the member to reinforce the point that I made – that the minister refused to allow any briefings on the bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Your point of order is?

James Newbury: That it is not relevant to what the speaker is speaking on. The minister did not allow any –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Brighton knows points of order are not an opportunity for debate.

Lauren KATHAGE: The member for Brighton has concern around advice from departments. I would advise him to take advice from the Victorian public, who have resoundingly voted for the SEC to be brought into Victoria. This is confected outrage, and all it seems to be attempting to do is slow up what the opposition are so fearful of, enshrining the SEC into the constitution, which is the subject of one of the bills which we would like to debate concurrently. This was endorsed by the people of Victoria, and there is no need to obstruct. People in workplaces all over Victoria today are going to be doing more than two things at once, and I think the very least they can expect is for their legislators and parliamentarians to be able to do multiple things at once. There is no reduction in the rigor or transparency or process when we are discussing these bills concurrently. It just requires that members maybe put in a little bit more effort.

The member for South-West Coast noted that people in Victoria would expect us to be focused on the cost of living – she referred to the cost of nappies. That is one of the things at the heart of these bills: bringing in the SEC to reduce the cost of power bills, to take us away from our reliance on fossil fuels. That is the purpose of getting these bills done. We absolutely have the back pockets of the Victorian people at heart when we do this.

The going back in time three days for media releases, 50 years for energy production and back to the reliance on fossil fuels – we simply will not stand for it. This back to the future, backward-focused opposition with their confected outrage – all they are doing is holding up our ability to debate and pass these bills. This obsession with the past needs to stop. We have to accept and rejoice in the fact that we are moving towards a renewable energy state. It is something to be incredibly proud of, something to happily talk about in the chamber and to our constituents about.

I look forward to potentially debating the bills concurrently because I want to see in our constitution that the SEC is protected from the greedy hands of those who are not truly interested in the cost-of-living pressures of Victorians, who are not in touch with people who really know what it is like to struggle to put food on the table, but simply are opposing for opposition's sake. It is totally transparent, and I request the opposition to get on board.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:38): I rise to support the member for Brighton's amendment to the motion before the house today. We know that we are in a cost-of-living crisis and energy is the key element that is driving up people's bills. Energy affects just about everything that we deal with. The motion before the house is effectively about looking at the SEC and the issue of effectively consolidating the debate on this very, very important bill. It is something that is going to be enshrined in the constitution, and to enshrine anything in the constitution is a very, very important issue. The problem here, as the member for Brighton has alluded to in his comments, is that there has not been proper consultation. There was not the consultation that anyone would expect for any bill that we debate, let alone one that would enshrine legislation in the constitution. You would think that the government would at the very least allow that consultation to happen, but yet again the government have not done their homework. They, on one hand, have tried to rush some things through the house and on another have pushed this back so we are not going to be able to debate this until sometime next year.

With an energy crisis like we are in, it is important that we actually get on and do something. A shell company, show bags, jelly beans – those are not going to bring down power prices. The government is certainly betting everything on the hope that this SEC is going to change the lives of Victorians when it comes to their power bills. We have seen a 25 per cent increase in power bills in the last 12 months, so it is important that we see action, which we are not seeing by this government.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I think you can anticipate the point of order I am going to be making, which has been made by previous people in the chamber: there is a very narrow procedural debate at hand.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member has strayed from the procedural context, and if he could come back to it, I would appreciate it.

David SOUTHWICK: As I was saying, what this government is trying to do is effectively steamroll this whole process. It is something that is so important when you are taking a bill and enshrining it into our constitution. This is not just another change of a law, but this is something that will effectively change things for years and years to come. To do that, you would expect that the government would do their homework. As the member for Brighton has quite correctly pointed out, the fact is that this government has not even provided a bill briefing and has not even consulted on this with anyone –

James Newbury interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: We know, as the member for Brighton has pointed out, that the department is ready to go. If the department is ready to go, what is the government hiding? Why aren't they willing to actually provide this information?

We have seen many, many occasions where this government have tried to rush things and have not done their homework, and we come back and have to see a bill before the house again. The government just do not get their stuff right. There is a real concern here. The government came at the beginning of this sitting week, in which we were going to debate two bills separately, and now they have changed the game. They want to debate these concurrently, and they do not want to do it this week, but they want to do it sometime next year. Power prices will continue to go up. The government, again, do not seem to see the urgency of getting this right. They have had months and months and months to get this right. This was an election commitment that they made – even though those of us on this side of the house do not think it will do a thing in terms of changing power prices. Nonetheless they have spent 12 months talking about this election commitment. We have not seen anything, and all we hear is more hot wind and hot air. Again, it is going to be adjourned off to sometime next year, while Victorians continue to pay high power prices and pay for the government's mismanagement and the waste that they continue with.

Assembly divided on amendment:

Ayes (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, 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, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Noes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Amendment defeated.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keefe, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.**Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (10:52): I rise in relation to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023, and the Victorian opposition will not be opposing this bill. I am going to go through parts of this bill bit by bit in relation to what it is about. The first part of this bill will be amending the Child Employment Act 2003, and this is in relation to the working with children check for PSOs. Currently Victoria Police do not have to have a working with children card. They are exempt for obvious reasons. Victorian police, if they have anything with a charge or criminal aspect to it, will automatically be suspended from Victoria Police, so the disciplinary action will actually prevent them going into a place of education whilst they do not have that working with children card. So whilst they are working there has been an exemption for a long period of time. This is just expanding that to PSOs. PSOs and police all work with young people at different times, whether it is in public areas like railway stations or proactively when they are meeting up with groups.

One of the things the opposition know when we are talking about it is the importance of Victoria Police when it comes to young people here in Victoria, and one of the things we miss is that proactive engagement. We do not have the same proactive engagement that we had in the past, and we are seeing the consequences of that now, which are a growing divide in disrespect between youth and Victoria Police. We are seeing some specific areas where that is increasing faster than others, and we know some concerns have been raised from teachers and from former police officers. One just recently was whilst I was out in Dandenong at Emerson School, which is a specialist school in Dandenong. It is an amazing school with John Mooney, and I know the member for Dandenong regularly visits his school. They have got a fantastic reputation in our local community. Before coming into Parliament I was actually lucky enough and had the honour to work there as a police officer for a 12-month period with young people. Working with young people in a specialist setting is so important, and having Victoria Police do that to break down a lot of the barriers is one of the best crime prevention models that we can have for people with intellectual disabilities and for people who have other disabilities in life – learning disabilities – that can prevent them going into occupations et cetera later in life and who may become engaged with Victoria Police.

I have also met with a good friend of mine, Dave Glazebrook, who is at Melba Support Services, and we have opened the discussion now. We have got too many people in the justice system, particularly who are incarcerated – so they have actually got a penalty involving jail – who do have intellectual disabilities or other disabilities. Using the right treatments, we probably could have prevented them coming into the prison system itself. I think that is a really positive step forward if we can start to engage them at a different time when they enter the justice system rather than when it is too late and they end up with a sentence in prison.

Using services like Melba in the future, I think there is a great opportunity that we could actually remove these people from the prison system, saving a lot of money, which I am sure everybody would be very pleased with – getting these people back out into the community but giving them the support and services that they need. These are the things – changing the working with children checks – which make a big difference in how the police can do this and also how Victoria Police and the PSOs can do it in future.

The second part of this is:

to amend the **Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958** to further provide for the allocation of certain property, rights, liabilities and obligations of the Country Fire Authority to Fire Rescue Victoria ...

This is in relation to Fire Rescue Victoria, formed after CFA and MFB merged, with legislation that came through this place, and there are obviously certain parts of this which are still a carryover from what happened at that time – to make sure that we can combine them and to make sure that the right assets are transferred across to the right place now we have got FRV so we have that protected.

We have raised concerns. This has taken a long period of time to come through, but I think the concern – where this bill could be expanded or needs to be reviewed – is that some of the cost savings that were supposed to come about with the merger to FRV of CFA and MFB were around the HR departments, the payrolls, the back end of the services and support staff. The problem is those savings have not come forward because of the fact you have still got two effective enterprise bargaining agreements (EBA) running within the fire services. You have got a division A and a division B – former MFB and former CFA. They have different conditions in their contracts, so there are certain aspects of what they can and cannot do, programs they can attend. There are differences in allowances, differences in overtime. All of these things, by having them in two different areas, have sort of meant that the FRV have to keep a huge back end of bureaucracy staff to assess and work with each as individual organisations rather than what was planned to be one. So we say to the government: there still needs to be a lot of work done on that.

We sent this out for consultation, this section, and we did have responses from the union, from Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, that there were no great concerns in what this was about but there were still issues raised on how we could save money within the fire services to reduce the costs which are costs passed onto Victoria. And as we know from the *Report on Government Services* that has come out, Victoria is the most expensive place to deliver fire services in Australia by a long way. The outcomes do not match that cost. Our outcomes are not greater than every state in this country. They are greater than some but not all. Our volunteer sector is also one of our most powerful, but when it comes to the paid side of it, I think the government need to reassess this on how we can reduce those costs that do not need to be spent and maybe even reinvest some of that saving into the fire trucks that are needed here in Victoria that we know not just the union is asking for but the volunteers across our state are asking for.

On the next part of the bill, I note that the member for Murray Plains, who has been looking forward to me talking on this, is not here.

Members interjecting.

Brad BATTIN: Oh no, he is going to get me now – and the Speaker in the chair! I am about to talk about the amendment to the Firearms Act 1996 in relation to the surrender of firearms, licensed

firearms dealers and special conditions for long-arm licences. First of all, to those from the department who are here, excuse me if I get this totally wrong when I try and describe a firearm that this is in relation to. But from the notes I took, this is not going to change most firearms here in the state. What it does refer to is a firearm with a lever action – I am looking for a nod on that one. It is a lever action that has a cartridge. If you have a cartridge in it, you can only have a cartridge that has five bullets inside that cartridge. This is actually something that we believe is common sense. We have raised this with the shooters associations et cetera. I have kind of got a nod from over there. I am hoping it was a nod to say it was right. Having just the five bullets does make sense here.

We are very lucky here in Australia that we have got some of the best and tightest gun laws in the world, and there are reasons around that. These are the sorts of things that bring us into line with other states but also bring those firearms into line with other firearms here in Victoria. The associations have, as a rule, said they are quite supportive of this when they have given feedback to us, or they have given feedback to us that indicated they did not have any concerns with it. One thing that appeared to be pretty welcome broadly was the surrender of firearms to licensed firearm dealers. Any way we can get illegal firearms off the street is a positive – not all but any illegal firearms – and to give access to alternatives for some people who have a fear of taking those into police stations I think does actually open it up for firearms that we do not want out in the wrong hands to get handed in rather than disposed of by illegal methods or in illegal ways where they could end up potentially with someone who we definitely do not want to have those firearms. So we do welcome that.

The next part was to amend the Road Safety Act 1986 to further provide for the use of vehicle-immobilising devices, and that is in relation to the spikes if you put them out there. When you can put spikes out on the road, it gives the Chief Commissioner of Police more powers on that. While we are talking about road safety, I will put in here that road safety, we know, right at the moment is one of the most important topics probably we should be talking about as we approach Christmas. We have had 269 – that was the last count that I saw – people die on the road here in Victoria. I read in Parliament this week a letter from Commissioner Grant Stevens, who is in South Australia, whose son at just 18 became a statistic. People will hear of him as ‘101’, and the reason the commissioner wrote that was that his son was number 101 for deaths on the road in South Australia. I have said before that having children who are driving – one is two years into her driving, one is about to get her licence – does have an impact. I think many in here would be in a similar boat where you have got young children who are going through that phase of learning or have learned to drive, and it is a great fear, the first day they go out on that road without someone sitting next to them. Road safety is something that we need to do.

We would love to see the government as well consider future legislation in the Road Safety Act or bringing back into the Parliament the road safety committee, a very, very important and – we talk about powerful committees – a very powerful committee when you think about the things that it achieved when it was here in the Victorian Parliament, dating back to the introduction of seatbelts – we know seatbelts save lives; in relation to changes on Victorian roads around drink driving and how we can assess drink driving; and recommendations around safety devices on cars, including things like ABS upgrades of cars that end up becoming Australian national standards. These committees provide an opportunity for members of this place to call in the experts, those that understand, and genuinely find out what the impact on our roads is and about road safety across Victoria. At the moment the national road toll is up 6.5 per cent and Victoria is up nearly 20 per cent, and we need to ask why. At the last look I had, it was 52 deaths above the five-year average. We did have a reasonable few years in there which were quite low.

We in here have all heard and seen the TAC ads of *Towards Zero*, which I think were quite effective ads. Again, another section they should look at in the Road Safety Act is how we actually have an impact in the ads we run. Now, many would remember the most recent ads around target zero. It was a gentleman walking down a laneway, and they asked him what he thinks a reasonable road toll is and he said 50 or 60. And then they had 50 or 60 people walk around the corner, and he was standing there

and it was his cousin and daughter – it hits home. It is 50 or 60 people. If one of them is your family, that is bad enough, but we have seen recently two, three and four in one car; five people who were out having a celebration. These are statistics that are getting to the heart of everybody, and it is something we really need to focus on, that target of zero.

But I would go back further, and I would say some of the best TAC ads were ‘Drink and drive, you’re a bloody idiot’. I think that had a massive impact and started to change us from our record road tolls above 1000 down to where we are today. We saw ads of a Kombi van and a person who was fatigued and ended up driving in front of a semitrailer. Anyone who saw that ad for the first time at the movies, it will never leave you because the ad stops as the truck is about to go over this kombi van, and then the next scene is a kombi van effectively crushed in the background. We need those ads back out there again, but putting them on channels 7, 9 and 10 is a waste of time because not many people watch 7, 9 and 10. Excuse that, my media friends upstairs, but the reality is most people watch or get their daily news online, so we need to have a focus on a road safety education program that is very much online. The other side of this is that we need a lot of work done on our road conditions, but going across into this bill, we are in support of these police powers to ensure that they have the ability to take people off the road who are the most dangerous on the road. That is what this is about, effectively, being a bit more pre-emptive, proactive and able to use those spikes.

I would say in addition to this that there is one thing that has changed over time. Whilst we do not ever want to see any pursuits on the road – in an ideal world we would see no pursuits on our roads. However, we do have to get to a position – because pursuits now are very, very difficult for Victoria Police. Someone has to make a call on what you can and cannot do, who is going to be responsible, who is going to be liable, and it only takes one person to call off a pursuit, who may not actually be at the pursuit at the time: it could be a radio operator; it could be a sergeant who is sitting at another location. There are all these different spots that they could go out to and then have people who could make that call on stopping a pursuit.

The challenge with this is it is actually getting to a stage where those who are the offenders driving know what they can get away with, when a pursuit will be called off and what they have to do to get a pursuit called off. Again we have got to be very cautious about where the line on this is, but I think it is about time we give a bit more protection to Victoria Police to make that call without risks to them that they are going to be sued or placed in a position for criminal charges if they do the right thing in a safe environment, which they generally do. Coppers do not go out there and try and go flat out through lights at 120 kilometres an hour when they are red. They would call that off. They would not do a pursuit through a school zone at 3 o’clock on a Tuesday; they just would not do it. But it has got to a stage where it has gone so far the other way that there is more interest in calling it off and saying we can try and find or identify the offenders later. I think that is a bit of – in my view – a concern and something we need to address going forward, to give them back those powers.

The bill is to amend the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 to provide for the procedures and operations of the Countering Violent Extremism Multi-Agency Panel and for the powers of the courts and Secretary’s delegates in relation to support and engagement orders. Although it will not affect it, it is probably prime time to talk about this, considering what is going on with the federal government. We have had questions in this place in relation to how many of the 141 people that have been released from the federal system are in Victoria and what we are doing to ensure that people in Victoria are safe from those people who are out on the street. I think it is something we need to very much address, and again it is something that we support in here.

The bill is also to amend the Victoria Police Act 2013 in relation to the code of conduct for members of Victoria Police personnel; medical assessments of fitness to participate in inquiries relating to an alleged breach of discipline; conditions that may be imposed on a police officer or protective services officer for a breach of discipline or an offence punishable by imprisonment; the restorative engagement and redress scheme for current and former members of Victoria Police personnel; and unauthorised access to, use of and disclosure of police information – all very important topics. I know

that the Police Association Victoria, when we discussed this, did have a couple of issues, but I will put on record I understand that there is an agreement now with the association and the government to iron out who can do the assessments et cetera. I think the police association through an exchange of letters are quite happy with that, which is a positive outcome.

If only we could have the same outcomes at the moment with the police negotiations that are currently happening, where the government has refused to sit at the table with the Victoria Police Association and Victoria Police members around what is happening with their current EBA negotiations. I know, Acting Speaker Farnham, one that will impact with you is when they are starting to talk of the removal of the protections for one-man stations across our state. These are the things that the Victorian government need to be talking about. It is not in the legislation – the one-man stations – it is in the EBA. Maybe we should consider putting it into legislation to protect these one-man stations, because regional communities and towns deserve and have the right to that protection. One of the changes – if anyone has not been following it – in the EBA is simply to remove or change one of the clauses which effectively says a member at a one-man station is protected in that role and can only be taken away in extreme circumstances. It might be a terrorist attack, it might be a flood or a fire where they are needed in extreme circumstances at a different location, but the police management have the power to move them. The change to this particular ruling in the EBA would be that it would effectively go back to management to move them for an operational purpose. It does not sound like a big difference, but an operational purpose could mean a station in Forrest – a one-man station – could be told that his shift will now be in Colac, 45, 50 minutes away, because they are short staffed. Rather than fixing short-staffing at Colac by removing the only police officer in Forrest, we should be addressing the issues we have with where our Victoria Police staff are located or what divisions we have them in. We are taking them off the street when they should be out protecting our community and we should be keeping our police stations open. This also links into the 43 stations that are going to have reduced reception hours. At first, when people saw that, they did not believe it, to be honest, because they thought no way in the world can you close 43 police stations in Victoria for between 8 and 16 hours – that does not fit. But it does. It is even in areas like Sunbury. Not only are we talking out in regional areas, we are talking about closing down the stations in metropolitan Melbourne, so the stations will have locked doors.

The stations are used all day and night. People say, ‘Oh, Brad, they don’t get used at night.’ I would love to sit with you one night down outside Prahran police station if you tell me it is not used at 3 in the morning on a Friday night or a Saturday night. And the people that are using it are victims of crime. They are not coming in to get their stat dec signed, they are not walking in to get an affidavit signed by a sergeant; they are coming in because they are victims, and when they are in the street they know that the place of safety is their local police station. In Sunbury now when you do that and you get to the police station at 1 in the morning and the door does not open, there will be a little sign on the door to tell you where you can go: ‘Here’s another place that you can go and relocate to to get the support you need’. In Sunbury that might be 10 minutes away, which for a victim is a long way. But if you are in Colac, that could be an hour away in any direction, and you cannot go anywhere with it. You can press a little button on the door. It would be fantastic if you have just been sexually assaulted to press a little button on the door and have someone talk to you through an intercom and say you can go to Geelong if you like. Stations are used for that; it is what they are about. There are some stations across the state that were already closed at night. Everybody knows about them. It is these ones that they are saying are temporary – that they are going to close temporarily – which takes away the right of the victim to go somewhere as a place of safety.

Just last night we saw an incident in Melbourne where people who visited this Parliament – and we have heard the member for Brighton talk about this – went back to their hotel and were effectively blocked out of their hotel by a group of extreme-left protesters who think it is okay to stop people who are coming to our Parliament to talk about the concerns in Israel at the moment, about their family members. They came here in desperation. They are travelling around so everybody gets the message that they have still got family members that have been kidnapped or killed. They got back to their hotel, and they could not get in. Victoria Police could not go and move them on, because they have

not got the move-on laws. As we understand it, these victims then had to go to the local police station. When they got to the local police station, there was not a room or availability at the police station to support them at that time, so they had to wait in their car for half an hour. That is bad enough in central Melbourne when a station is open. Imagine if we start closing those receptions.

There is so much more that Victoria Police could do and need to do, but they need the support of the government, or they need the policy direction of the government. The government will come in here – I would say the Minister for Police, but he does not often come in here and talk about police issues. The police minister should be coming in and talking about it. They always say, ‘We’ve given record funding. We’ve given them all the tools they need. We’ve given them everything they asked for. If the Chief Commissioner of Police wants it, he gets it.’ Well, maybe you could do it a little bit the opposite way. You could put some policies forward that the chief commissioner has to follow in relation to opening stations. You could ensure that the priorities are around community safety – and not departmental staff effectively who are sworn police officers – and get them back out on the street. You could stop lying about the numbers that you have within the Victoria Police. You have had a decline for three years straight now in Victoria Police numbers – full-time equivalent roles – here in Victoria. Three years in a row those police numbers have declined.

We have got a massive issue with morale through the Victoria Police, not just because of the enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations but because of the 2½ years where Victoria Police became the front line of what was happening in COVID. No police officer signed up to go and prevent children in a park from going down a slide – no-one did – but that is what they were forced to do. So if we want to make some changes, we have got to build that respect back with Victoria Police. We have got to install the policies that direct the Victoria Police so that our goal is a community-focused and community safety plan, so that we provide places of safety like stations as a standard. We think our priority should be having police on the beat preventing crime, because if you prevent it, there is less use for some of the other departments in the background after those crimes are committed, because we can stop them.

There is so much that we could do and change in what we are doing with Victoria Police. When it comes to Victoria Police there is a section in here around discipline. The one thing and aspect that I would say we could and should change is the way that we talk in this place and in the media about Victoria Police based on minimal information that we get from one small YouTube clip or one small social media clip. It is time that we actually started to back Victoria Police. There are incidents that will end up going through a process, and if a police officer has breached the rules they should have the book thrown at them in whatever way it needs to be done. But we have got into a habit now where we cannot go out and defend the police in here or in the media, because the media will go ‘Here’s one little image’ – and there is nothing of what happened prior; there is no context for what is happening – but all of a sudden we are expected to go ‘That’s fine’. I have seen instances where police use a vehicle to go and knock someone off their feet. That in itself looks terrible – if you watch that clip with no context, that looks woeful. If you then put a weapon into the hand of that person and see them threatening other police officers, it does change the context.

I am going to say one of the things I would love to see – which cannot be changed through legislation but can be done through changed attitudes in this place and the media – is us starting to back our Victoria Police and building up the respect for those men and women who go out and protect us every day. I will say that for our PSOs as well. Our PSOs do an amazing job in this place. We had James in the past who was injured out the front here in a hammer attack. We know they come under a fair bit of pressure in this place, particularly around some of the protests. And it is quite confronting too. We have seen protests in this chamber; it is quite confronting for PSOs trying to deal with that. It is easy, sitting down here, to go come on, just grab them and take them out, but you are also in a position where you have to protect your safety. Generally the places up in the galleries are safe, but if they get up into the galleries and you have got a protest, then you have got other people to think about – there are a whole lot of things. So to the PSOs can we say thank you as well.

As I finish my contribution, as I said, we are not opposing this bill. Can I put on record our appreciation for Victoria Police and PSOs, those men and women that will be out this Christmas while we are at home celebrating – they will be the ones that are on call. They will be doing the night shift; when we need them the most they will be the ones that turn up for us. I want to thank them and wish them all a very merry Christmas, from management the whole way through. Every single police officer will be there for you when you need them during this holiday period. That includes those members who I can almost guarantee you on Christmas night – so those on the afternoon shift on Christmas Day going into night shift – will have to attend an increased level of family violence, because it does become a high-risk day for family violence. Can I thank them – those police members that turn up, that go out into those circumstances and protect the most vulnerable who desperately need it at the time they need it. We cannot thank them enough for the work they do.

The next part of it is: do not have a go at a Victoria Police officer when you get pulled over for speeding, do not yell at the police officer if you get done for drink driving, do not have a go at them if you have done something wrong – take responsibility for what you have done – but thank them for saving your life, because the Victoria Police pull you over for speeding because speed kills. The Victoria Police will do a breath test on you and take you off the road because if you drink and drive you are a bloody idiot and you will kill someone. We need to start thanking them for the work they do.

To all my fellow colleagues in the Victoria Police, the PSOs and all of those who have served us over the time, I wish you all a very merry Christmas and a safe Christmas, and I look forward to working with you all over the next few years to get policies in place that build respect for Victoria Police and ensure that we can keep the community safe.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (11:19): I too rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I have to say, it was great to hear the member for Berwick talk about the importance of road safety and being sensible this Christmas and the festive season. What we do know is that year upon year, ultimately we see lives lost over the holiday season for a variety of reasons, and very, very tragically every single loss of those lives is preventable.

This bill makes a number of important changes that strengthen the way our police force is disciplined, ensuring that they keep our community safe to the very best of their ability. It deals with a number of different community safety issues, ranging from dangerous drivers to firearm protections.

I too would like to start by commending the work that Victoria Police do to protect our local community. I have to say, it was fantastic on a personal and professional level, not so long ago, to have the Minister for Police join me in the electorate of Laverton to visit not one, not two, but three police stations that operate in and around my part of the western suburbs. We took the time out and we started at Sunshine police station, we went to Wyndham North police station with the member for Tarneit and also visited the new police station – the quite astounding, incredible build that it is – in Werribee. What an extraordinary investment that is – a great, great investment. I know many of my colleagues from the western suburbs sitting in the house this morning have indeed visited that police station.

It gave such incredible insights – for someone who does not work in the police force – into the types of work that our local police are doing in and around my local community. We talked about many things. I have constituents raise with me – on a regular basis, from the inner west to the outer west – their concerns, issues and challenges. Sometimes they have got suggestions to improve police activity in their local area. It was great to be able to take all that information and then have open, honest, full and quite frank conversations with local police officers in the community and draw to their attention some of the things constituents have been raising with me.

I have to say, Wyndham North police station in Tarneit did a tremendous job in assisting me over the four years that I was the member for Tarneit by providing me with a community liaison officer. When constituents would raise their issues with me – from quite simple matters to others that were quite serious matters, where people had been victims of serious assault – I was able to connect that

community liaison officer with those constituents and residents, and they were able to go and have whatever the issue they had raised with me addressed in a more timely matter. That was something really great that Wyndham North police station did, and it is wonderful to have that type of assistance now being offered to me as the member for Laverton by Sunshine police station. I do really want to thank those police officers who have lent me a hand in that way.

The bill before us today is further going to improve the police's ability to keep our community safe. What we do know in this house – I think regardless of what party and background you come from – is the safety of all Victorians is absolutely paramount, and that is what this bill is about. It is really important for good governance and long-term governments like ours to keep introducing legislation to further improve the laws and the regulations that are all about keeping Victorians safe.

The first section of this bill deals with Victoria Police's discipline system. I think the community would well agree that the vast majority of the 20,000 employees of Victoria Police do the right thing each and every single day. They perform their jobs to the highest possible way in which they can, each and every single day, and it is really important to recognise that. It is also really important to recognise that on occasion there are those that do not do the right thing, and that there are safeguards, preventative measures, disciplinary measures and systems in place for those who do go ahead and do the wrong thing. It is important not just for those to be in place but also for the community to know they are in place to safeguard them against police pursuing the wrong action, particularly when it involves individuals. Victorians of all persuasions and views do expect our police to conduct themselves to the highest professional standards, especially when they are interacting with members of the community. It is members of the community, it is people like you and me, that need the police to protect them, to prevent crimes from happening and to intervene as they are happening but also to follow them up, sadly, after the fact. Now, this bill ensures this through a number of changes.

Firstly, it is going to empower VicPol discipline inquiry officers – the DIO – to direct a police officer, or PSO for that matter, to undertake a medical assessment if they believe that it is necessary to prove that the officer is physically or indeed mentally fit to participate in a discipline inquiry. Under the current legislation what we know is that police and PSOs do have the right to request an adjournment of a disciplinary inquiry on medical grounds. However, it is really important for a verification process for any medical evidence provided that does not actually exist. So in this way there is a process where the DIO can verify those medical reasons by way of a medical assessment. I would say it is also going to streamline things. Guidelines will be made available for DIOs to assist them with knowing when to make those determinations, which is really important. In addition to this, it is going to provide further integrity measures. Victoria Police will also update their relevant internal policies so that not only approved medical officers will be utilised for this purpose. It ensures that the medical assessments conducted through the process are less likely to be biased or partial.

The second important thing that this bill does in relation to police discipline is make breaches of the police code of conduct a disciplinary breach as well. You can see that by making it a disciplinary breach – by breaching that police code of conduct – it increases the seriousness and the serious nature of non-compliance with that code of conduct. The one thing that I think is common sense – and maybe this is something you could ask a person on the street – is that if the police code of conduct is not enforceable, what is the point of having it in the first place? This instead will make it binding on all police personnel and subsequently makes failures to comply with it subject to disciplinary action.

We have made the decision not to write the code into the Victoria Police Act 2013, and that is because doing so would make any changes to the code subject to legislative change. We want to make this code a living and evolving document. It is meeting community expectations, it is doing what it is supposed to do and it allows it to be updated in the future to reflect those community needs without needing folks like us to get involved every time this needs to happen.

The third change made by the bill in this space relates to the conditions that Victoria Police can attach to a good behaviour bond for officers found to have committed disciplinary breaches, and this will include adding a non-exhaustive list of all relevant conditions that are linked to the relevant breaches.

In the almost 60 seconds that I have got left I do want to take this opportunity to thank Victoria Police for all of their outstanding and hard work this year. Being here in this house, the work that they did over the two years that we had of COVID – that one-in-100-year pandemic in this state – was absolutely extraordinary. It was above and beyond. I do hope that our police officers, particularly my local ones in the western suburbs, have a period to spend their time getting some rest and relaxation to be recharged for 2024. To all of those officers, including PSOs, that are working over Christmas, over New Year and on our public holidays and indeed having to attend, as the member for Berwick talked about, scenes of family violence, speeding accidents and drink-driving accidents, I thank them very much for their service. They are an incredible attribute for Victoria. On behalf of my community, I would like to wish them a very merry Christmas.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:29): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

I do this because this morning on the front page of the paper we saw an outrageous hit on one of Victoria's most important watchdogs, the Attorney-General, and this house must take the time to debate these continuing attacks by the Labor government on our watchdog agencies. This is not the first time we have seen a hit on an agency based on leaks from a committee in this place. In fact we are now seeing a track record. We have seen it across multiple committees. We have seen it today with the attack on the Auditor-General. We have seen it with leaks from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC). We have seen it previously with the integrity committee, and also we have seen the behaviour of the Electoral Matters Committee spoken about publicly. All of these leaks have occurred because the government is concerned about the work these agencies are doing.

Today the Auditor-General released an important report into major projects, and at the same time we have seen the Auditor-General hit in the media. This follows two previous reports over the last weeks, one into consultants and contractors and, further to that, one into the state's finances. At a time when the important watchdog who provides transparency about government actions and behaviour is releasing reports that are embarrassing and calling out the waste, the mismanagement and the obscene behaviour of this government, we see another attack on that watchdog by this government.

Earlier this year we saw similar attacks on the eminent Robert Redlich after he spoke out about his concerns, especially about the former Premier and his government. We saw then leaks – confirmed leaks. This is not something that has been made up, this is something that has been confirmed. There is no question about it that the government, through PAEC, leaked information to hit a person of integrity, one of our chief watchdogs. It was extraordinary, but now we have seen it again today on the front page of the paper.

The Labor government is attacking our state's watchdog. It is outrageous. There is no question about it, and there is no question that it is a pattern of behaviour. How can this occur? How can we in this state have a government that is attacking good people who are doing important work to ensure the mechanics of government and the spending of government are appropriate?

Of course we support what they are doing. Any good-minded person would support the work they are doing. No-one would expect reports that these agencies release to be glowing. We would expect them to look through the work of government and suggest improvements. Of course we would. No government is perfect, but what any good government should do is take the learnings from those reports and do something about them – make changes where it is required.

We have not seen that today. What we have seen is an outrageous attack, a revenge hit job, on one of the most important watchdogs. This house needs to immediately consider why our committees are leaking like sieves to the media for one outcome: hitting integrity agencies that are reporting on the

workings of government. We have never seen such an outrageous display of leaks which are aimed at and designed to be revenge attacks upon the important work of these agencies. That is why this Parliament needs to consider these matters. That is why this Parliament must now turn its mind to these outrageous leaks, these outrageous hit jobs on our agencies on the days on which these agencies are releasing reports which are critical of government, and say enough is enough. This Parliament must deal with these important matters now. We cannot allow these revenge hit jobs to continue.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (11:35): It is disappointing to have to rise to oppose the member for Brighton's motion –

James Newbury: Don't – don't oppose it.

Iwan WALTERS: which of course I do. The member for Brighton has had a chance to speak, and now it is mine. The reason I oppose the member for Brighton's motion is that it feels like we have just restarted debate on a really important piece of legislation that is about ensuring that Victorians can have confidence in our police force, who represent all of us, and about ensuring that we have consent in our policing model. That is a really important piece of legislation that this motion seeks to interrupt. I think the member for Brighton began his contribution by slandering and verballing the Attorney-General and by making allegations which I do not think are –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, personal reflections are unparliamentary and they are out of order.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Iwan WALTERS: The simple fact of the matter is that the government has reappointed the Auditor-General. It is ironic that the member for Brighton suggests that I was making reflections on other members. To initiate the debate with profound reflections upon other members of other place, members of this Parliament, I think was inappropriate. To simply regurgitate some kind of unsubstantiated allegations that were made in the newspaper this morning while interrupting debate on a profoundly important piece of legislation before the house, I find deeply disappointing.

Michaela Settle: Frivolous.

Iwan WALTERS: It is frivolous, as the member for Eureka comments. It is a frivolous interruption of scarce time that we have in this place today, which is scheduled to be the last sitting day for the year. We may be here late, and I am looking forward to being here late tonight because there is plenty of material that we need to debate in this place. But it feels a shame that we have been waylaid away from dealing with, as I say, a really substantive and important piece of legislation designed to ensure that there is appropriate regulation of firearms in Victoria – that Victorians can have confidence in the police's own internal disciplinary processes – and to be again engaging in a 30-minute stunt that the member for Brighton has initiated that adds nothing to Victorians' confidence in institutions. It seeks to demean the Auditor-General and the work that he does. Whatever newspaper commentary the member for Brighton is talking about I think is just that – commentary for a newspaper.

The simple fact of the matter is that these institutions are indeed very important and that the government has reappointed the Auditor-General to his position. As a member of Parliament, I find the work that the Auditor-General does really important. It is helpful for me as a member of the Parliament, and not a member of the executive, to better understand the work of our agencies, of our departments, and I say this as a former member of SARC and indeed a former chair of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. There are mechanisms for us all as parliamentarians to be able to scrutinise and hold to account the executive. But to do it in this way, by seeking to interrupt debate on, as I say, legislation that is doing exactly that – strengthening Victorians' confidence in institutions – I find really disappointing. It is a shame that we have to be again interrupting time – important and scarce time – on debates of really important pieces of legislation that I hope to return to very quickly simply so that the member for Brighton can unfortunately make some base political points that I do

not think will have any traction. I do not think that the debate on this motion will succeed, again, because the government in this place has been elected by the people of Victoria to do just that – to govern on their behalf, to enact our agenda as the governing party.

I think the member for South-West Coast suggested earlier that pointing out this simple reality is arrogant. It is not a question of arrogance. I come here with profound humility to represent my constituents in Greenvale. But I also do it with a sense of obligation and responsibility that, having been elected upon a platform, we need to use the time that is given to us – the very scarce time – to work as productively and efficiently as possible. Every single half-hour that is taken out of the government business program when we get railroaded into this kind of procedural debate I think undermines our capacity to enact that legislative agenda and diminishes the confidence of Victorians in this house and our procedures. So for that reason, and for many others, I oppose the motion.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (11:40): It is sometimes said that if you stay in this place long enough you will hear everything. It was only earlier this morning when we were debating whether we should cognately debate the SEC bills that I think it was the member for Yan Yean, if my memory is correct, said 'The thing about us, we can multitask'. And the member for Greenvale seems to think it is not possible to both debate the police bill and also debate a very important matter relating to attacks on integrity officers in this state. I think we are absolutely capable. I think we are absolutely capable of debating both motions. We can, and that is why I support the member for Brighton's motion to adjourn this current debate. I have got a lot to say about the police bill, but I have also got a lot to say about attacks on the Auditor-General.

As the member for Brighton indicated, we are starting to see a pattern emerge here. Now, I have been here for a long time. I have been here long enough to remember when the Labor Party used to regard itself as the champion of the Auditor-General, champion of the independence of the Auditor-General. They used to take great pride in saying 'We defend the Auditor-General, we protect the Auditor-General'. But now – what happens now? We see these little leaks emerge, designed to personally target the Auditor-General. Now, what possibly could have led to this? Well, maybe it is complete coincidence – it could be a complete coincidence – but last Friday the Auditor-General tabled his audit of the –

The SPEAKER: Member for Malvern, I ask you to come back to the procedural motion.

Michael O'BRIEN: Absolutely. And this is why we need to debate the appalling attack on the Auditor-General now, because just last Friday he tabled in this house, out of session, the annual financial report, and here is what he said:

Debt rose again this year at a pace faster than revenue and economic growth ... The government have not laid out a plan for when and how the state will pay down existing and future debt.

Tim Richardson: What's your point?

Michael O'BRIEN: My point is: why is it that suddenly after the Auditor-General has pointed out that the emperor's got no clothes and that the government has got no idea how it is going to repay its debt, all of a sudden this personal attack on the Auditor-General comes out? You do not have to be there on the grassy knoll with a second shooter to put two and two together and understand that this government is attacking –

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Speaker, can I ask that the member is brought back to the matter before the house. Can I also remind the member that the government has actually just reappointed the Auditor-General.

The SPEAKER: Order! On the point of order in relation to relevance I do ask the member for Malvern to stick to the procedural motion before the house.

Michael O'BRIEN: The procedural motion is about interrupting the current debate so we can move to discussing the attack on the Auditor-General. I am very happy to discuss why that is important, because we have seen a pattern of attacks on independent officers of this Parliament, be

they the former IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich or now the Auditor-General Andrew Greaves. The Auditor-General is the ultimate umpire when it comes to the state's finances, and they should be performing a role that should be respected broadly by everyone in this house and indeed by those in the community. But the trust in the Auditor-General is undermined when we see political hit jobs like we saw on the front page of the *Age* this morning. Now, where possibly could that information have come from? Where possibly could information about the inner workings of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee come from to inform that article? I think that is an important question that we need to understand now, which is why I support the member for Brighton's motion.

No government is beyond independent checks and balances. IBAC is one independent check and balance; we saw the former IBAC Commissioner get attacked and traduced. The Auditor-General is an important independent check and balance, and now we are seeing a similar pattern of behaviour. The clear message from this government seems to be: if you are an independent office-bearer and you seek to hold the government to account, you will be attacked – you will be attacked in personal terms. Well, on this side of the house we say we are not going to cop it. We are not going to cop it on behalf of those independent officers. Also, we are not going to cop it on behalf of the Victorian people, because independent officers should be just that – independent. They should not be looking over their shoulder worrying that if they say a single word not in line with the government's philosophy, they are going to get attacked on the front page of a major newspaper. The member for Brighton is absolutely right: let us adjourn this debate and get on with protecting our independent Auditor-General.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (11:45): In rising to speak on the procedural debate, I am a bit concerned about how this has come to be and what this means for this place. Having served with the member for Brighton on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), I am a little concerned about the information we were provided as members in a confidential setting and then the discussion of the Auditor-General's role. I think it is inappropriate to use procedural motions to be led around on the procedures of this house, and if there was to be an inquiry into serving independent members in the auditing space or oversight space, this is really an inappropriate place for that to be considered or discussed, and that is why I will say members should strongly oppose this procedural motion.

When you come in and you misname the Auditor-General as the Attorney-General and when you misname the paper – whether it is the *Herald Sun* or the *Age* – the rushed nature of such a procedural adjournment shows that this has not been considered in depth. It has been rushed and it has been brought forward here to landmark, for whatever reason. Maybe it is just that again the coalition is running out of speakers, running out of time, running out of people who want to contribute to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023, which is a significant and serious bill in this place. I think it is also upon members who have served on PAEC, who have some of that privileged information – some that was outlined and detailed in the *Age*, but there is a substantial amount more to some of the discussion that we were privy to under confidential matters – to then not use that as a political grandstanding point.

I am not surprised by the member for Brighton. I am a little more surprised by the member for Malvern, who has shown in this place respect for procedure and respect for some of the functions and the approaches here. This is a serious diversion. The reasons that they stated and outlined in their concerns around former Commissioner Redlich of IBAC is the exact same as to why you would not bring a procedural debate to then discuss the Auditor-General's role. It is a significant overreach in this Parliament's assessment or otherwise, and to suggest that we debate the Auditor-General is a serious misstep, in my mind. The member for Brighton might want to consider that in the time – maybe in amending the naming of the Attorney-General and the *Herald Sun* and misappropriating a couple of things, the member for Brighton can reflect on rescinding this procedural motion and owning up that this was an overstep. The member for Brighton, if you have talked to him enough, has served in the federal Parliament as a staffer and a senior in that and respects those procedures there. The overstep here and the overreach are a significant and egregious approach to this Parliament towards debating that position.

There is a standard form for that, which we teased out as PAEC members on an extended basis for months. We had advice from the solicitor-general, we had advice from the Parliament on where our approach to this issue would be. We found that it was very delicately in PAEC's remit and we had to be extremely careful. Some of that is now in the public domain and has been described and discussed. If there is an approach, if there is a consideration, there are forms of this house to go through. It is not through a half-attempted, half-baked, quick type-it-up-and-print-it-without-proofreading-it procedural motion and adjournment right here.

I say again and make the point: the Auditor-General has been extended. The Auditor-General has made a substantial amount of reports on behalf of Victorians that are a really important and appropriate discussion. Some of them are uncomfortable for government, but that is the work and the role of the Auditor-General that we respect and admire. It is why in the work that the Auditor-General's office does they consult with members of Parliament on things that are important and that they might see as appropriate for their consideration. So not only is there the consultative frame from the Auditor-General, there are also the reports that are put forward.

The notion that one report and the allegation that was submitted by the member for Malvern – he knows that does not stack up, because there have been reports that the Auditor-General has done that have been critical of government or critical of the public service and that require scrutiny and require consideration of recommendations, and they have done that for decades. That is the appropriate system and form for the house that we have. The notion that this has been, as described by the member for Malvern, suddenly an attack is an outrageous suggestion. The procedural motion and its use, I think, need to be reflected on. If we are going to come into this Parliament and sling and throw mud and take down the standards of this house through procedural motions each sitting week, we are lowering the colours of this Parliament and we are lowering the standard of how we operate in this Parliament. Let us get on with the business before the house.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (11:50): I also rise in support of the member for Brighton's very important motion to suspend consideration of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023 for this very good reason: we should not read on the front pages of the newspaper a political hatchet job, a political attack on an independent officer of this Parliament who is charged with the responsibility to oversight the actions of this government, its departments and its agencies – and that is exactly what this is.

Ms Smethurst of Fairfax press has clearly been in contact with members of the government. She has clearly been fed information by members of the government seeking to undermine the independence of the Auditor-General, seeking to undermine the credibility of the Auditor-General and seeking to undermine the credibility of the work of the Auditor-General, who just in the last week has produced a number of reports which have cast this government in a light which is –

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural matter where we should be debating whether we are going to move into the substantive debate on the motion that has been put. Putting the arguments and the substance of what you want to discuss in a motion – this is not the time and place. You are better than that. It is about procedure.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, member for Wendouree.

Juliana Addison: Sorry, Speaker. So I call on you to say –

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Juliana Addison: I call on the Chair – that is what I am saying – to please ask the members of the opposition to speak to the procedural nature of this, not the substance of what they would like to discuss.

The SPEAKER: Members are reminded that this is a procedural debate. There has been some straying already, member for Sandringham. I hope that you can speak to the procedure that is before the house.

Brad ROWSWELL: Certainly, Speaker, and I will do just that. The motion moved by the member for Brighton is worthy, absolutely worthy, in my view, because as important as the consideration of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023 may be to this Parliament and to the people of Victoria, the matter before the chamber at the moment is far more important. A government member made the point before that the bill before us –

Tim Richardson: The member for Greenvale.

Brad ROWSWELL: the member for Greenvale – thank you, member for Mordialloc – that effectively we can only be doing one thing at once. Well, we have the ability. I would like to think, looking around the room, looking around the chamber, that we are more or less adults and that we can do more than one thing at once, and the reason why the member for Brighton has moved this motion is because of the shock at and the unacceptable nature of the way that the Auditor-General has been undermined on the front pages of the paper this morning.

Members on this side of the chamber respect our independent agencies. We deeply respect and value our integrity agencies, our watchdogs. They provide an important service on behalf of all Victorians to keep the executive accountable. Speaker, you know, I know and members of this place know that time and time again – not just in this Parliament but in the last Parliament – independent officers, commissioners and leaders of independent integrity agencies and watchdogs in this state have historically been undermined by members of the government.

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Speaker, can I ask that the member is please brought back to the motion that is before the house? It is a procedural motion that is quite narrow.

The SPEAKER: Member for Sandringham, I ask you to come back to the motion before the house.

Brad ROWSWELL: We on this side of the house – yes, on the opposition benches for at least another three years, sadly – respect the role of the Parliament. We respect the role of the Parliament, we respect the rule of the executive and we respect the role of committees. But the fact that there has been a leak from a committee that has ended up on the front page of the newspaper today is completely and totally unacceptable. I look to the Auditor-General's report of last week, which identifies that this government have absolutely no plan whatsoever to pay down the debt they have incurred over the last nine years. The largest debt of any state in the nation – more debt than Queensland New South Wales and Tasmania combined – is the debt of this state, and that is something that was highlighted in a report by the Auditor-General just last week. No wonder there is a political attack – *(Time expired)*

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (11:55): I am profoundly disappointed by this motion. I have never spoken in a procedural debate before – I have spoken on a government business program – but I felt the need to jump up on this one, given I was the next speaker for the government on the piece of legislation which was outrageously interrupted by this motion. This is important legislation that is seeking to enhance Victoria Police's capacity to keep our community safe. This interruption based on a news article, I am sorry, beggars belief – it really does. I actually refuse to deign to discuss the spurious claims brought into this place by the member for Brighton, based on an article in the *Age*.

Members interjecting.

Daniela DE MARTINO: I think you may –

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Apologies, Speaker. I think Ms Smethurst was writing for Fairfax newspapers, if they are still called that.

As both the members for Greenvale and Mordialloc have raised, this place is simply not the place to discuss such matters, and the opposition diminish themselves by doing so. The opposition has consistently opposed our government business program throughout the entirety of this year, with the

exception of a handful of times, to the point that when there is actually support from the opposition for our government business program, we are surprised.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is not a debate on the government business program.

The SPEAKER: I will give the member for Monbulk the benefit of the doubt and hope that she is referring to the procedural motion.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Where I was leading with that was that after opposing the government business program this week, this motion feels like another way to attack it by stealth. It is an interruption to the legislation which has been agreed upon for us to debate. This is our final sitting week for the year. Our time is being wasted here. This is the time that the Victorian public have given us in good faith; they have elected us to this place. It is not an arrogant thing to claim this, by the way. That is often what is lobbed at us when we remind the opposition that we were voted in to get on with the job. We have a vision for this state. We have clarity of vision for this state. Our legislation before us today is here because it is important. We need to get on with debating it. Half an hour will have elapsed, half an hour will have been chewed into of the time for us to bring this legislation before the Parliament and, with all the goodwill in the world, hopefully get the bill passed today. It has been interrupted by the opposition. I must say I think we just have to call it a stunt, because that is what it is. We have heard from the member for Berwick, himself a former police officer. I was listening intently because there is lived experience there. I do appreciate that the member for Berwick would like to see Victoria Police have the capacity to keep our communities safe, as we all do in this place because we have a shared, common interest. If the opposition continues to oppose merely for the sake of opposing, I am afraid to say they will consign themselves to those seats for a very, very long time.

I implore those opposite to discontinue the stunts and let us get on with the business of governing for our state. We are all here with a shared, common passion, purpose and vision to improve the state of Victoria. We can only do that by continuing to pass legislation which we know serves the benefit of all Victorians. That is why we are here. That is the reason we turn up in this place. It is the reason we turn up to our electorate offices. It is the reason why we spend long days and long nights and give up our weekends. It is the reason we all work really hard, each and every one of us – because we believe in a better Victoria. That does not occur by playing games, by pulling stunts and by interrupting the important business that we are all here to undertake. So I must say I am profoundly disappointed, which is why I put my hand up to jump up and speak on this – against my better judgement possibly, but it is with an absolute driving passion to make sure that we get on with the job.

Assembly divided on James Newbury's motion:

Ayes (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, 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, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallenge, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Noes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:05): I rise to make a contribution on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. In starting off my contribution on this bill can I put on the record the Liberals and Nationals' support for our police officers right across Victoria but particularly for our police officers that are in our one-man stations and our small stations throughout regional Victoria. They are the core of our communities. They are looked up to and respected in the communities and relied on when there are tragedies and crises in our communities. That is why I want to put on record our support for them and our respect for what they do.

I am very, very, very disappointed that the government would be considering closing down those one-man stations. It is very disappointing that the government would be considering closing down those one-man stations and forcing those officers to go into the larger stations. It is also very disappointing that most of our larger 24-hour stations in regional Victoria now are closed at night. They do not have the staff to have those police stations open at night. Despite the rhetoric of the government that they are putting the resources in to keep Victorians safe, the police do not have enough police officers, do not have enough resources to make sure the stations that are supposed to be open for 24 hours in our larger regional communities are actually open because police officers are being drawn back to other duties. It is not the police officers' fault these things are happening. They are under immense stress with the work they have to do in the community. It is a fact that the government have not resourced and anticipated these things happening in our communities. I think it is a slight on the government that they have not sufficiently resourced the Victorian police force to make sure that those stations can be open 24 hours a day and that there is a threat to our country one-man police stations into the future.

This bill does a number of things as it works through various pieces of legislation. One of those is around the working with children checks under the Child Employment Act 2003. What this does is make sure that those people who are working for the Victorian police in the justice system who currently have to have a working with children check do not actually have to have one of those in the future. It also changes some property rights and makes some changes to the Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 around property that should have been transferred to the Country Fire Authority at the time of the firefighters presumptive rights legislation going through.

It makes a number of changes in the policing sector: it strengthens the integrity of the Victoria Police disciplinary system and supports Victoria Police and other agencies to maintain community safety. But I go back to what I said before, that it is so disappointing that the government has not made enough police available to make sure all the positions are filled in Victoria.

It amends the Firearms Act 1996 to allow licensed firearms dealers to receive, accept and take possession of firearms from unlicensed persons who are not exempt from the Firearms Act for the purpose of sale, registration or destruction.

It makes some changes, as I said, to the Child Employment Act and the Worker Screening Act 2020 so that police custody officers come into line with Victoria Police and protective services officers and do not need a working with children check as part of their employment conditions. It is a sensible change because these people have already had the same background and security checks as police and PSOs.

The bill makes some amendments to the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003, and when I read this particular part of this legislation, it came to mind that if police actually had move-on laws in this state, some of their problems would be solved. They could make sure that where there were inappropriate gatherings, where there were people that were coming together where police were concerned that it could lead to trouble into the future, they would have the powers to move those people on. It is very disappointing that the current Labor government took those powers away after the coalition put them in when we were in government between 2010 and 2014. It was something that the police wanted at the time to give them the powers to make sure that they could actually control crowds, control issues, control situations that can get out of hand. I think it is very disappointing that the police do not have these powers, and last night was probably an example where those powers would have been beneficial. As was said earlier today in this house, it is extremely disappointing that

there appear to be some members of this place using the current situation in the Middle East, in Gaza, to incite threats to people in this state.

People come to Australia because of what we are and how we value our multicultural society. They do not come to Australia to create division and trouble. If it is true that a member of this house was actually involved in inciting the actions that we saw last night, that goes against the integrity of a member of Parliament to uphold the law and do the right thing by Victorians. It is very, very disappointing that it looks like that has happened. It is a challenge for us as a Parliament as to how we deal with these issues. I do not think we can just wash our hands of it. I think the collective of this Parliament has a responsibility to make sure that that does not happen again, and we need to find a way as a Parliament as to how we actually hold any MP to account that might do that and what penalties may be put in place for an MP in the future that may incite those sorts of circumstances. For the families of people who have been kidnapped in Israel – who are here to tell their story, to seek support, for the friendship our country offers – to be put in a situation where they had to go to a police station, where they could not go back to their own hotel, is just so very, very wrong. If it is true, I condemn the people that were involved from this house that did that. We need to make sure we do something about that into the future.

This legislation also amends the Road Safety Act 1986 to enshrine a police code of conduct into the legislation, which VicPol requested to support the Chief Commissioner of Police. VicPol wanted to highlight that the act would strengthen how important it is to officers to comply with the rules and regulations in the future. It gives the police the ability to employ vehicle-immobilising devices in a great range of proactive situations. This change will give blanket approval, but specific situation approval will still be sought from local commanders on each occasion. I think with these issues around the fact that perpetrators now think they can outrun police – that if they do something wrong, they can actually speed away, cause risk to the community, cause risk to individuals with collisions or with pedestrians being hit by vehicles that are fleeing a police pursuit – this will give police more power to make sure that people into the future will not think they will get a get-out-of-jail-free card if they speed away because police do not intend to chase them because of the risk it puts to the rest of the community.

As has been said by our lead speaker, this makes a number of sensible changes to quite a few pieces of legislation, and the Liberal and National parties will not be opposing it.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (12:15): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. This bill amends the Victoria Police Act 2013, the Firearms Act 1996, the Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958, the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003, the Road Safety Act 1986, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 and the Worker Screening Act 2020. So it is evident, just by listing all the acts that this bill seeks to amend, that it is a fairly comprehensive bill, and it is very pleasing to hear that it has bipartisan support.

This bill will introduce a suite of reforms with the purpose of maintaining community safety, which is paramount for all of us here. It will do so by increasing Victoria Police's capacity to regulate firearms, by making administrative enhancements to the operation of the countering violent extremism multiagency panel and by expanding the circumstances in which police officers are authorised to use vehicle-immobilising devices. Strengthening the integrity of the Victoria Police discipline system and ensuring that Victoria Police personnel operate in a way that is consistent with community expectations is another key aim of this bill. It will also enhance the privacy of participants of the restorative engagement and redress scheme for Victoria Police – I will refer to that as the redress scheme – and make minor technical amendments to other Victorian legislation.

Safety of all Victorians is foremost in the minds of each and every member of this place, and this bill will ensure Victoria Police have what they require to keep our communities safe. I echo the members for Berwick and Laverton in calling for all Victorians to drive safely. I would like to put that front and centre before I continue speaking. As we enter the Christmas holiday season, please stick to the speed

limits, please do not drink and drive and please do not be distracted by mobile devices. If you are in my area of Monbulk, please slow down as you approach the curves, because it is interesting terrain up there. I do implore people to drive particularly carefully at this time of the year, because our road toll is simply a tragedy. This bill will also enhance Victoria Police's disciplinary system and support Victoria Police and other agencies to maintain community safety, with dangerous drivers to be targeted earlier and stronger safety controls placed on recreational firearms, as I mentioned before.

I have much admiration and respect for Victoria Police. It has more than 20,000 employees. It delivers policing services to over 6 million Victorians, with approximately 14,000 interactions with members of the public every day. They work to ensure our safety, and for this I am eternally grateful. My oldest and dearest friend Jane – her father Dennis was like a second dad to me growing up. He was the first police officer I ever knew, so from childhood I developed quite an appreciation for the demands of the role through knowing him very, very well. Dennis was actually at Russell Street when it was bombed – he was in the building – and Constable Angela Taylor was his colleague. I was just reading up about that before, and I always forget how young she was. She was 21. As the mother of a 19-year-old son, it is quite a frightening thought to think that someone so young lost her life in the course of her duty.

Dennis was also shot in the shoulder in the line of duty. It is an injury which more than 35 years later still causes him physical pain. He also attended Melbourne Zoo back in I think it was 1989, when a poor soul decided that he wanted to end his life by climbing into the lion enclosure. Dennis was there and saw that horrific scene. He saw far too much in the line of duty, so much more than most of us here can even contemplate, with the exception of the members for Bayswater and Berwick and other frontline first responders the members for Melton and Frankston. Dennis is a man of the highest integrity, and I wanted to take this opportunity to pay homage to him. He is one of the finest men I have ever known. As I say, through knowing him I have admired police officers and the work which they do, and I agree wholeheartedly with everyone else that they are incredibly deserving of our thanks.

The local police across my electorate also do marvellous work, I have got to say. I had the opportunity to visit both Emerald and Monbulk police stations with the Minister for Police and discuss the local challenges for them. I was very pleased to also attend Belgrave station, and they gave me a very comprehensive briefing on their emergency management plans. The work that goes into planning for emergencies, in particular bushfires of course – I mention them often here; I know I sound like a broken record, but they are forefront in the minds of the people across the Dandenong Ranges – and the work that they do in the background to ensure our safety is just unparalleled, and I owe them a debt of gratitude, as the member for Monbulk, on behalf of all people who live there. We are in very, very good hands.

I would also like to mention that as we do come into the holiday season, as we discussed yesterday when talking about frontline workers, our police are not going to have the luxury of taking time off to be with their loved ones like the rest of us will be able to do. They will probably be working harder than ever. I know New Year's Eve is one of those days where no-one can get leave. It is a blackout day for taking leave because it is such a busy one for them. So while we are all doing whatever we choose to do on New Year's Eve, be it being in your PJs and in bed at 10 pm or being in the city watching the fireworks – whatever floats your boat – they will not have the luxury of that choice. They will be out there making sure that we are all safe. So a huge and hearty thanks to them for that too.

I would like to join the members for Berwick and Laverton in giving a huge shout-out to the PSOs who work here in the parliamentary precinct, day in, day out, to ensure our safety. I have got to say their presence makes me feel safer. I hope they can enjoy potentially a quieter time over the next couple of months until Parliament resumes again in 2024.

The member for Laverton spoke at some length on the disciplinary process reform which this bill will amend, so I do not want to cover that ground, but I want to talk about protecting the privacy of redress scheme applicants. The scheme is available to former and current Victoria Police employees who have experienced workplace sexual discrimination or sexual harassment. It is a topic really close to my

heart. When I was a national industrial officer at the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, I actually in the end became the trainer for sexual harassment. I would travel around to the branches around the country and train up union officials and delegates on how to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace when members approach them with their stories. It is something that is all too prevalent in workplaces, unfortunately, so it is really important – and this bill will make amendments to ensure this – that participants of the redress scheme have confidence that the private and sensitive information they share with the Department of Justice and Community Safety to facilitate and support redress is confidential. So many people hold back from divulging information because they do not want their name put to it or they do not want to be identified for a whole range of reasons, and I am really pleased to see the amendments which this bill makes to ensure that people can feel confident in coming forward and knowing that their privacy will not be breached.

The secretary will be authorised to provide de-identified and thematic information from the redress scheme to IBAC instead of listing people's names. This scheme provides participants with an opportunity to access personal support and redress in a really non-adversarial setting, and that is key as well. In other words, participants are not required to make a formal complaint or pursue legal proceedings to access the benefits of the scheme. We do need to make it easier and less threatening for people subject to sexual harassment or sexual discrimination in the workplace to come forward, and privacy is absolutely paramount in ensuring that this occurs, because the reality is many participants will not come forward if they think they are going to be named. They want to improve the culture of Victoria Police, so this bill really supports that happening. I am really proud that as a government we have identified this, and we have ensured that this bill contains the levers to ensure that this occurs.

The bill is, as I said before, quite comprehensive, and I cannot list all of the amendments. I do want to just say one more time thank you to Victoria Police for keeping us safe, but safety is also a personal responsibility, so people need to ensure that their behaviour out there is smart, especially on roads, especially over Christmas time. I would love to see our statistics not increase anymore, and I implore all Victorians to go carefully and safely and not to create more work for our amazing police officers.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (12:25): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023, and I will start by endorsing the remarks of the member for Monbulk in relation to the –

Members interjecting.

Michael O'BRIEN: It is the season of goodwill to all. In that spirit, let me endorse the remarks of the member –

Members interjecting.

Michael O'BRIEN: Do not make it hard for me, this is difficult as it is. I endorse the remarks of the member for Monbulk in praising the great effort and dedication of our frontline service workers, including Victoria Police. I think that is a sentiment that we all – well, at least most of us – can get behind coming up to this holiday season.

There are two aspects of the bill I will concentrate on. One is a fairly dry legal issue – which is probably appropriate for a Shadow Attorney-General – but it is an important one. There have been some decisions by Victorian courts recently, particularly the Victorian Court of Appeal, which have had a big impact on the jurisdiction of VCAT. VCAT was established by the Liberal–Nationals government in the 1990s as a consolidation of a whole lot of different tribunals that were operating. It brought them under one roof. It is a very sensible approach, and it is one that has been adopted in other states – you have got a Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal and you have got other states who have got their own version of VCAT. It is designed to offer relatively low cost, relatively informal access to dispute resolution.

But what we have seen with some recent legal decisions is the jurisdiction of VCAT has been cut down. That is a great concern to me because the purpose of VCAT was to try to avoid putting matters into higher, more expensive courts – if you could avoid it. Why litigate a matter in the Supreme Court if it could be dealt with more quickly, more effectively and at a lower cost in a jurisdiction such as VCAT? But in a couple of cases, including *Thurin v. Krongold Constructions (Aust) Pty Ltd*, the Victorian Court of Appeal determined that VCAT does not have the power to hear matters that invoke federal jurisdiction. For example, if a claim is made using the Australian competition and consumer law or a defence is raised under such an act, or if a claim is made under the Corporations Law or a defence is invoked using a similar sort of act, all of a sudden VCAT is out of the game.

Now, that has provided a great problem, because a lot of work that VCAT had done previously was work that involved mainly state legal issues, but occasionally a plaintiff or a defendant would throw in a federal claim or a federal defence. As soon as that happens, under these new rulings, VCAT can no longer continue to hear the matter. These matters are now having to be referred on to another court – to a Magistrates' Court or a County Court or the Supreme Court. That is a problem. This bill, in part 8, clause 60, seeks to address a tiny little issue that has arisen in relation to it. This amendment is one that I have called for, and it is one that is good so far as it goes, but it does not deal with the bigger problem. But I will deal with this particular amendment first.

There is an issue where if a matter which is invoking federal jurisdiction is raised in VCAT, that matter is then effectively sent to, or referred to, another court – a Magistrates' Court, the Supreme Court or a County Court. There is an issue there if somebody has been joined to that action at a later date, the statute of limitations could then run against them. So you may well have sued a number of parties within time, but a defendant, for example, could join another party and they could say they do not believe they are negligent, but if they are, somebody else is really responsible or somebody else shares responsibility, you can join a party to an action. If that is done, depending on the timing, it could potentially mean that that party cannot be sued at all, because if the statute of limitations has expired once that matter is referred to a different court it means that person has effectively gotten off scot-free. So what clause 60 of the bill seeks to do is insert a new section 4A into section 77 of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998. It says:

To avoid doubt, a reference in subsection (4) to the commencement of a proceeding includes the joinder of a person who was not a party to the proceeding in the Tribunal referred to in subsection (4)(a).

I did warn the house that this is fairly dry legal stuff, but it is important. What this means is that effectively if a matter is then referred to a court the fact that somebody has been joined at a later time will not be held against the party joining them for statute of limitations purposes. At least that is my understanding of what the intent of this clause is to do, and to that extent we support it.

There is a bigger piece of work that needs to be done, and that bigger piece of work is: how are we going to provide for VCAT to continue to be a forum where a lot of issues can be dealt with so not every single matter dealing with a federal issue has to be referred to a court? Goodness knows our courts have big enough backlogs. VCAT has big enough backlogs for that matter as well, but our courts are suffering at the moment. We cannot have a situation where every single legal issue that raises a smidgen of a federal matter is suddenly out of the jurisdiction of VCAT and has to go off to a more expensive court and for a longer wait. So my question to the government is: what is the government going to do to fix this ultimate problem? The government could declare VCAT to be a court. It could pass legislation to do that – that is a possibility. The government may not want to do that, but the government cannot simply say we have done all we can, because the government has not done all it can, and the government needs to fix this. They are my comments in relation to that aspect.

In relation to the police disciplinary matters, we need to do everything we can to encourage more people to want to serve in blue. We need to do more to encourage recruitment, because we are seeing at the moment that the lack of recruitment under this government is causing massive problems on our streets. I received an email a couple of weeks ago from my local area police inspector. It says:

Good morning, Michael.

Victoria Police has made the decision to temporarily –
we hope –

reduce public reception counter hours at 43 police stations across Victoria. Malvern is one of the police stations where the public enquiries counter will, from the 19th of November 2023, be reduced to 8 hours per day.

Malvern has been a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week station for as long as I have been the member and I suspect long before that. We are now going from 24-hours-a-day public access to 8 hours a day. And the reason why – because there are not enough police. Whose fault is that – the government's. This government has been in for nine years.

Nick Staikos interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: Who else does the member for Bentleigh want to blame? The government has been in for nine years. At what point is this government going to start taking responsibility for the proper resourcing of Victoria Police? Do not blame Victoria Police. You cannot blame the opposition. There is only one person the government can blame, and that is to look in the mirror. The reason why my police station is being closed 16 hours a day is because members opposite have not provided Victoria Police with the resources they need to recruit the people they need to keep that station open. It is fine for them to say it is only counter hours; who wants to get an affidavit sworn at 3 in the morning? Victims of family violence fleeing home want to go to a safe place, and often that safe place is a police station. If those doors are shut, telling you to go and find somewhere else is no help to somebody fleeing family violence. This is a serious issue, and the government needs to take it seriously – it absolutely needs to take it seriously.

I recently surveyed my community. I sent out a community safety survey right across the electorate. I have had hundreds of responses so far. And no shock to me, maybe a shock to those opposite: 92 per cent of respondents want to see our police station returned to being a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week police station. There is an enormous amount of concern. In my electorate of Malvern we have seen burglaries go up by 42.6 per cent in the past 12 months alone. That is a real blow to people's sense of safety, not just for those who are affected but for all the neighbours and everyone who hears about it.

We need to get serious about improving community safety in this state. We need to get serious about tackling crime, but we cannot do it when we have a police force which simply are not recruiting enough people to keep stations open. That is my challenge for the government over the next 12 months – make sure Victoria Police recruits members and get our stations back open to the public as they ought to be.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:35): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Crimes Amendment (Non-fatal Strangulation) Bill 2023

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (12:35): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Crimes Amendment (Non-fatal Strangulation) Bill 2023 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 3, page 11, line 27, omit '34AE.'" and insert "34AE."
2. Clause 3, page 11, after line 27 insert –

34AL Review of amendments made by Crimes Amendment (Non-fatal Strangulation) Act 2023

- (1) The Attorney-General must cause a review to be conducted of the operation of –
 - (a) this Subdivision; and
 - (b) section 5(2)(ba) of the **Family Violence Protection Act 2008**.
- (2) The review must be commenced no later than 2 years after the commencement of the **Crimes Amendment (Non-fatal Strangulation) Act 2023**.
- (3) The review must be completed no later than 6 months after it commences.
- (4) The Attorney-General must cause a copy of the review to be laid before each House of the Parliament no later than 14 sitting days after receiving it.”.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (12:36): I move:

That these amendments be agreed to.

In doing so I would like to just address a few comments. In particular we do acknowledge that there are different views on various aspects of the bill and that the development of the bill has taken a long time, partly because of several legitimate but divergent views. It has been hard to land the right balance, and we thank all of those involved in shaping the final version of the bill. The job of reforming the justice system never concludes; these offences are no different. In the second-reading speech we did commit to reviewing the operation of these offences, and given the complexity of the bill a statutory review after two years is warranted. It is the standard review clause which will allow the act to be reviewed two years after commencement.

I would just like to take the house back to the statement made by the Attorney-General in the other place back on 18 October when she made a particular statement that the reforms will create the two offences: firstly, an offence of intentional non-fatal strangulation, which does not require proof of injury and will carry a maximum five-year prison term; and a second more serious offence of non-fatal strangulation where a perpetrator intentionally causes injury, with a maximum penalty of 10 years. The Attorney said, and I think it is prudent to remind the house of these comments, that:

Non-fatal strangulation is rarely an isolated event. Instead it often reveals an ongoing and escalating pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour – especially when it occurs in family violence circumstances.

We’ve listened to the concerns of those families affected by these acts of violence and the Bill will make this behaviour clear for what it is – controlling, dangerous and unacceptable.

Can I say further that I do commend not only the Attorney and her leadership but the wise counsel across both chambers in this Parliament. There has been very intensive and serious and deep engagement with stakeholders – perhaps stakeholders is not quite the right term when we are talking about victims and families and understanding and having an empathy for the challenges and the grief that they have endured – and we have all worked very hard to bring to the house, with again those amendments to be taken into consideration, a bill that tries to affirm the best values of members and a willingness to try and enliven the values of the Victorian community into how we can address these matters and give not only peace of mind but protection and accountability in relation to non-fatal strangulation becoming a standalone offence. I commend not only the bill but the amendments to the house.

Michael O’BRIEN (Malvern) (12:39): I appreciate the words of the Minister for Police. I think we have seen in the adoption of these amendments some bipartisanship on a very important and sensitive issue, and I am very grateful to the Attorney-General for being open to having those discussions with me and to agreeing to these amendments proposed by the opposition in the other place. This is a bill with the best of intentions, but as we all know as legislators we do not always get it right, or maybe when we think we get it right courts or police and prosecutors have a slightly different view. When we are dealing with something that is designed to improve the lives and the safety particularly of women in a family violence situation, it is vital that we get it right, and that is the reason why we proposed a statutory two-year review after the operation of this bill comes into law.

There is potential for unintended consequences in the way in which this bill has been drafted, and I think we all accept that. I was listening to some of the Attorney-General's comments in the committee stage in the other place earlier this morning. She was very open about saying that she has been really wrestling with this issue of how to draft it in order to make it as effective as possible without having unintended consequences. I commend the Attorney for doing her best. While I would love to be in her position, I do not envy her that task, because it is very, very difficult. For that reason we have come to a very sensible view as a Parliament, which is that, yes, the bill should proceed in its current form but there should be that built-in review after two years to give it a chance to work. Hopefully, it will work perfectly as intended.

Hopefully, women's lives will be saved because of what we call Joy's law, and I again pay tribute to Joy Rowley's family: to Les Woolridge, Nadine Power, Aaron Woolridge, Renee Woolridge and Annalisa Wooldridge. They have been campaigners for this. They have been determined that what happened to Joy should not happen to other women. They wanted the tragedy of her death, her murder, to beget some good. I hope that for everything they have given to this – their time, their emotion, their heart – they can be pleased that their efforts have changed the law and hopefully will change the safety of women in this state. With those comments I commend the amendments and commend the bill.

Motion agreed to.

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

Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (12:42): I am delighted to stand to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I am very delighted to stand to speak on what is an incredibly important bill, particularly in light of the frivolous acts that we saw from those on the other side, who sought to adjourn this debate to play political games. I find it really distressing that on the one hand those opposite will stand up and suggest that they are the great friends of the police force and yet they seek to adjourn off a debate on what is the last day of Parliament, attempting to make sure that we cannot debate this bill in full.

The member for Berwick in his contribution went even further to politicise community safety. He stood there and tried to suggest that single-officer stations will be closed down and in doing so to just alarm the community. The Chief Commissioner of Police made it very, very clear that there are no plans to shut down single-officer stations. Perhaps those on the other side could stand with our police force and with our community instead of seeking to gain political points endlessly with these debates.

As I said, I am very glad to stand to speak on this bill. I join those on this side of the house in extending my thanks to the police force across Victoria. We know that we are entering a very confronting period, frankly, for them, and as was pointed out by the member for Malvern, very sadly, domestic violence increases during this period. So I, along with others, extend our genuine thanks, and we genuinely stand with the police force.

This bill goes to a number of matters. It will enhance Victoria Police's disciplinary system – there are a couple of elements to the bill around the disciplinary system. But something that others have not so much touched on is the firearm amendment, so I will speak briefly on the police bill, but I would also like to turn to those matters. We know that there are over 20,000 employees of VicPol, and they deliver policing services to over 6 million Victorians, with approximately 14,000 interactions with members of the public every day – that is every day. They work incredibly hard for us, and it is right that this bill seeks to make recommendations to reform the disciplinary system. We know that the bulk – the

vast majority – of our police officers are of the absolute highest integrity, but this means that they can go out there knowing that the community have faith in that integrity as well.

The first amendment will empower a Victoria Police discipline inquiry to direct a police officer or protective services officer to undertake a medical assessment if they are satisfied that the assessment is necessary to determine whether the officer is physically and mentally fit to do so. At the moment PSOs or police officers who are subject to a discipline inquiry can request an adjournment of the inquiry on medical grounds. This amendment will mean that they can be directed to do so, but it will also ensure that only approved medical officers will be utilised to do that. The bill also ensures that a breach of the Victoria Police code of conduct is a breach of discipline. It is essential that the code of conduct be sufficiently enforceable to enliven the intent of this amendment, and to that end the government welcomes Victoria Police's commitment to continuing consultation with the Police Association Victoria, the Police Registration and Services Board and the Department of Justice and Community Safety on the development of this code of conduct.

The bill will amend provisions relating to the conditions Victoria Police may attach to a good behaviour bond that applies to a police officer in a disciplinary context, including adding a non-exhaustive list of relevant conditions, specifying that conditions must be reasonably linked to the relevant breach of discipline and confirming how non-compliance with a bond might be addressed.

The fourth amendment, in regard to police discipline, will extend the statute of limitations for the offence of Victoria Police personnel accessing, using or disclosing police information. It currently sits at 12 months, and that will be extended to three years. That is necessitated by the fact that sometimes these matters take a while to come to light, and the 12 months basically was too brief for the matter to come to light, be fully investigated and then acted upon. As I say, I would like to join all our members in thanking the police force for all that they do and all that they will do for us in this coming season.

Another aspect of this bill relates to the Firearms Act 1996, and I just want to acknowledge that the Allan Labor government is unwavering in its commitment to ensuring the firearms industry operates safely. A point I really want to make, and I know that the member for Ripon and I agree on this, is that we understand that sport shooting and recreational hunting have many positive economic and social benefits, particularly in our regional communities. This government stands firmly in making sure that the laws around the firearm industry operate safely but also acknowledges the importance that firearms have. Many in this house know that I come from a farm. It is a day-to-day tool on your farm, having firearms to deal with pests and so forth.

We have some of the strongest firearm regulations in the world. Look, you will not often hear me say this, but the one and only decent thing that I think previous Prime Minister Howard ever did was around the firearms regulations that they brought in after the appalling atrocities that happened in Tasmania many, many years ago. I remember at that time on our farm we had to go through and get together all of the firearms and hand them in. That was around being able to fire multiple shots at once. This amendment actually goes to both of those matters. We are in the middle of an amnesty at the moment, which was brought in federally in 2021, and this seeks to just make clear that people can use the amnesty to hand in firearms, but to a dealer. There was just a little bit of a lack of clarity there, so this is really to make sure that that clarity exists. It also amends the act about bolt action shotguns that have detachable magazines. As I said, the one thing Howard did was about getting rid of the ability to fire many bullets in fast succession. That was the really important part of it. What we are finding here is that detachable magazines have increasing capacity, and so we end up really having a rifle or a firearm that has the capacity to fire many bullets. This bill will state the condition that they cannot carry, possess or use a detachable magazine greater than five shots in combination with a bolt action shotgun. It just goes further in that work. It ensures that legitimate firearms users can still use bolt action shotguns, but it also ensures that firearms regulation is responsive to changing community needs. I really just wanted to highlight that aspect of this bill.

There are also some amendments around the Road Safety Act 1986 which give police officers the ability to use immobilising devices in a broader range of situations. As someone who lives in East Ballarat and goes to sleep at night to the screeching brakes of hoons, I think this will be a good addition to the arsenal of the police.

In my remaining minutes I really want to return to acknowledging our wonderful police force. We are going into a very, very busy time for them, and they keep us safe. As many have pointed out, while we are sitting at home – well, I am actually going to be camping – with our families on Christmas Day, many of those officers will be at work, making sure that our community stays safe throughout the Christmas period. So unlike those opposite, I am very glad to speak on this bill. I think it is an important bill, and I am glad that the adjournment sought by those opposite was voted down, allowing us to get on with this important debate.

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (12:52): Acting Speaker Farnham, as this is the first time I have had the opportunity to speak before you, I congratulate you on your recent appointment.

I rise today to debate the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023, an all-encompassing bill that makes several amendments to the Child Employment Act 2003, the Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958, the Firearms Act 1996, the Road Safety Act 1986, the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003, the Victoria Police Act 2013, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 and the Worker Screening Act 2020.

According to the government the bill before the house introduces a range of policing reforms which are aimed at strengthening the integrity of the Victoria Police discipline system and supporting Victoria Police and other agencies to maintain community safety. Further, the bill will amend the Firearms Act to allow a licensed firearms dealer to receive, accept or take possession of a firearm from an unlicensed person who is not exempted by the Firearms Act for the purposes of sale, registration or destruction.

Police custody officers, PCOs, will also now no longer be required to obtain a working with children check if they are engaged in child-related work, including as part of their role as a PCO. This will provide consistency between key frontline Victoria Police roles regarding working with children check exemptions and will remove the current duplication of worker screening requirements for PCOs. This is a sensible change considering that PCOs are subject to the same background and security checks as it is.

We also have amendments to the Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 which fix a drafting error in the relevant act resulting from the CFA and MFB merger some years ago and which will further provide for the allocation of certain property rights, liabilities and obligations of the Country Fire Authority.

Further, we have some minor technical amendments to the VCAT act to address a potential ambiguity as to the operation of section 77, particularly following the case of Krongold Constructions and Thurin of 2023. The bill clarifies that if a matter is referred to a court under section 77(3), the court has the power to extend any limitation period, including to any party that was not joined to a VCAT proceeding before the matter was referred. Part 7 of this legislation enshrines the police code of conduct into legislation, which according to the government was requested by Victoria Police to emphasise to all officers how important it is to comply with the police code. Victoria Police play an essential role in keeping our community safe and protected, and police officers are entrusted with significant powers which must always be used responsibly and ethically, which is why it was concerning, though, to hear earlier this year that there had been a jump in 2022 in the number of police officers subject to disciplinary hearings, with some officers accused of family violence, sexual harassment and unjustified use of police information. A total of 17 police officers had been dismissed in 2022, and a further 31 resigned while their cases were being heard. Other alleged offences included predatory behaviour targeting colleagues or vulnerable community members, prejudice against community members of different ethnicities, drink driving and drug use. Such behaviour of course is unacceptable, especially for those whose first and foremost duty is to uphold the law and maintain public trust and confidence.

If a minority of police officers act poorly or indeed illegally, it can harm the entire community and other police personnel. It also harms the reputation of police, especially when the vast majority of police are upstanding and doing the right thing, often in difficult circumstances.

Such a measure in this bill to enshrine the police code of conduct into legislation will hopefully send a strong message to those police officers in the minority who have done the wrong thing but also to all incoming new police officers as to the significance of their duties and reassure the public that police officers as a whole can be trusted to keep the community safe and protected. I want to again reiterate as well, though, that the vast majority of police officers are upstanding, ethical and brave individuals who sacrifice their own safety for our sake, so it is sad that a minority of officers can tarnish the reputation of Victoria Police.

Speaking of Victoria Police, the Victoria Police neighbourhood policing forum is on 6 December from 9:30 to 12:30 at the Mornington Golf Club in my electorate. Local services and community members are welcome to talk with police about important issues in the Mornington electorate and broader peninsula, examining topics including current crime trends and crime prevention, young people, family violence, road policing and drugs and drug-related crime. This will be a fantastic opportunity to build bridges between the community and those who protect the community, fostering a relationship of greater trust and transparency between police and the public, and I commend all the officers at Mornington police in my electorate for the terrific job they do locally, often in difficult circumstances and with sometimes limited resources given to them.

On amendments to the Firearms Act 1996, this bill will also place a special condition on the holder of a category A or A and B long arm firearms licence who has obtained the licence for the reason of hunting, sport or target shooting. The special condition will state that a licensee cannot carry, possess or use a detachable magazine greater than five shots in combination with a bolt action shotgun. I understand that Victoria Police requested this specifically due to it being an emerging issue, but the government has admitted that there is no hard evidence to support this. This five-capacity limit came out of a range of consultations and discussions about appropriate safety thresholds. The broad stakeholder consensus was for a limit but not about what the limit was to become. On the record, a five limit is somewhere at the lower end of the range that was proposed. Of course most avid gun owners and shooters in Melbourne and across Victoria are responsible and decent people, and I know many. At the same time, we must take action to prevent those minority who do or might do the wrong thing, but without punishing the majority of law-abiding gun owners and shooters.

On the amendment of the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003, this act – the TCPA – provides Victoria’s countering violent extremism laws. The TCPA currently provides for two early-intervention pathways for persons who have been assessed to be at low to medium risk of engaging in violent extremism – the voluntary case management and support and engagement order schemes. The TCPA establishes the countering violent extremism map, which provides coordinated case management by key government agencies for participants in these schemes. The bill also makes important changes to facilitate the operation of the CVE map and the VCM and SEO schemes to ensure they operate efficiently and effectively. These matters are more relevant than ever given the recent heightened tensions given the situation in Israel and Gaza. We have had some people actively supporting Hamas, a proscribed terrorist organisation. We have also had neo-Nazis trying to target Jewish people on our trains and streets and people calling for an intifada against the Jewish people, and we have also had people at protests chanting antisemitic slogans and more. Such behaviour is deplorable and disgraceful. I fully support –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Mornington, it is now time for lunch. Everyone, time for a hamburger and a chocolate milkshake.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:01 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

*Business of the house***Community safety**

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:01): (*By leave*) I wish to make a short statement to the house about the incident overnight at Crowne Plaza. Yesterday, like many members of this house, I met with a mother whose son was murdered, I met with a young woman whose brother is currently hostage in Gaza, I met with an uncle whose niece was killed and I met with friends of a young woman who was kidnapped at that music festival. In their moment of grief and trauma these people found the courage to travel to the other side of the world and tell their story. They found the courage to leave behind their support network and their loved ones as well. When someone who has made that journey comes into this Parliament, we listen. Wherever they are from, we listen. Every member of Parliament had an opportunity to hear these families yesterday, and every member of these families has the right to feel safe. Instead, after a day of meetings with community leaders, they went home to rest and were confronted with a disgusting display. A group of hardcore protesters arrived in their hotel lobby. They were shouted at. The protestors used offensive signs and props that have no role in protest. The only purpose of these props was cruelty.

It is one thing to stand here outside of Parliament and have your say; it is another thing to go to Fed Square or to any town square anywhere in the world and peacefully put your case, but seeking out grieving families just to taunt them, just to scare them, waving distressing props in their face – that is not about having your say, that is about hurting people. I want to make this very clear: I condemn the extreme behaviour that was on display last night in the strongest possible terms, I condemn antisemitism in the strongest possible terms and I condemn the act of targeting people in their unique moment of grief.

I know the Victorian people agree that, whatever your views, everyone expects your fellow Victorians to act with decency and humanity, and last night what we saw was not decent. It was not civil. It was cruel and heartless, and my heart goes out to these families as a mother, an aunt and a Victorian. I want to say to each of them that what you experienced last night does not represent our state. Victoria is proudly a multicultural society. We celebrate our diversity, and where we have differences we debate them peacefully and respectfully. Above all, we respect each other. We show compassion and love, and I continue to ask all Victorians, including all members of this house and this Parliament, to do the same. I appreciate the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:04): (*By leave*) Yesterday we saw the best of this Parliament when the member for Box Hill and I hosted as part of the Liberal Friends of Israel a delegation of Israeli families, two of which had had members killed. They were here to share their traumatic stories with us. Another four had their family members taken hostage, and they were here to ask all of us to advocate to bring their family members home. It was the best of this Parliament, and I have had a number of colleagues come to me and say that they have never quite experienced something so emotional before, but what is even more important is that those people left this Parliament feeling as though we had their backs. The commentary that I had from them – and they were in the federal Parliament the day before – is that our Parliament actually embraced them. We embraced them.

To go from what was yesterday the best of moments for our state to the worst of moments in terms of what happened last night is unforgivable. No-one should behave like this. No-one should target people because of their background, because of their faith, because of their religion, because of their ethnic diversity – no-one should do that. Everybody has a right to have a view, but no-one should be targeting somebody for who they are. What reason did those anti-Israel bigots, thugs, have to attend that hotel last night? What reason? Those family members came back last night, after visiting a school to once again share their story, at 10 o'clock at night to then have to be evacuated back to the police station for 3 hours and come back once the hotel was cleared so they were safe. This is what the world stage is seeing in the way that we behave.

I share with the Premier her comments today in condemning that, and we will work in whatever way we can to ensure that never happens. There is no place for that here – none. To think that we have these kinds of individuals that are doing this – covering their faces, shutting down and blockading a lift, an escalator, which was effectively the entrance into these people’s hotel – they are gutless cowards that have no place here. Ultimately, we need a response. I would say that we need to do whatever it takes – more police, more resources, more powers. I know we have been talking about move-on laws, which I will keep talking about, because those people in what they did – trespassing on private property at a hotel, shutting down effectively an entrance to a hotel – should not have been there. So I share with what the Premier has said today condemning these hateful, hurtful people.

I just wanted to finish by commending the courageous individuals that came here to share their stories with us: Iris Haim, mother of Yotam Haim, 28, who was kidnapped by Hamas terrorists; Tali Kizhner, mother of Segev Kizhner, 22, murdered by Hamas terrorists – and Tali was here yesterday to tell her story; Elad Levy, uncle of Roni Eshel, 19, murdered by Hamas terrorists; Mika Shani, sister of Amit Shani, who was kidnapped by Hamas terrorists; Ofir Tamir, friend of Noa Argamani, and Amit Parpara, also a friend of Noa, who was kidnapped by Hamas terrorists.

The shining light in all of this is for Mika, 16 years of age, sister of Amit – Amit is now being released. She will be able to go back and see her brother. But we want them all returned safely. We want an end to this, and I say once again to anybody that thinks it is okay to target people like this: it is simply not okay. There are the steps of Parliament, there are other places for you to have your protest – not in people’s hotels, not in people’s lobbies, not in people’s lives. It is unacceptable, and there is no place for that in this great state of Victoria.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

State Electricity Commission

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): My question is to the Premier. Today the government announced a \$245 million spend on a majority Singaporean-owned private sector energy project, which was already proceeding. This money would deliver power saving bonuses to almost 1 million Victorians. Why won’t the Premier help Victorians struggling to pay their power bills in the lead-up to Christmas?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): I am delighted to have the Leader of the Opposition ask a question about the big and important announcement by the minister for bringing back the SEC. Let me put the Leader of the Opposition’s mind at rest: it is back. The SEC is well and truly back and making a difference in driving renewable energy projects here in Victoria. The minister for the SEC and I were there this morning with representatives from a range of companies to talk about the establishment and the start of works on the Melbourne renewable energy hub, a site that is going to be home to one of the world’s largest batteries, which in time will have enough storage to provide supply in peak periods to around 200,000 homes, about the equivalent of – if you put all the members of Geelong and Ballarat together, those communities – Geelong and Ballarat.

John Pesutto interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition is interjecting on his own question. I am delighted to go to some of the observations that were made this morning by Equis managing director David Russell, who joined the minister and me on this very question of the progress of their project and the difference of having a partnership – he called it a ‘unique’ partnership – with the state of Victoria and how it has made a difference to driving more quickly this investment, to bringing the project online more quickly and the difference it is going to make. Indeed he made comments about how as a result of the confidence that the company and the partners have in the partnership they have with the government through the SEC that they have expanded their equity commitment to the partnership. They also talked about how the partnership with the SEC delivered results more quickly than anticipated. Also he said, and this is a quote:

The partnership resulted in an expansion of the project ... which will result in more capacity being put into the system, which will drive down prices.

This is the advice from the industry. It appears the Leader of the Opposition has got a document over there. It appears that he is about to jump up and have a bit to say about David Russell. You know what, whatever clown show is going on over there opposite, we are focusing on delivering.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): The government claimed that the SEC would deliver ‘cheaper power bills’. Is it now government policy that majority privately owned energy projects, including those owned by international companies, do deliver cheaper power bills?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, you have asked your question. I would ask you to cease interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): Well, again, maybe the Leader of the Opposition was so busy interjecting in all his excited little ways over there – so busy with his interjection and so keen to get on to his supplementary question – he might have missed some of the comments I provided to the house that were made this morning, because do you know what? I know this is a difficult concept for someone who leads such a divided outfit – they do not know about partnerships on that side of the chamber –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question is about whether it is government policy that majority privately owned energy projects do deliver cheaper power bills. I ask you to bring the Premier back – care to join me on your feet?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, have you concluded your point of order?

John Pesutto: On relevance, Speaker, I ask you to draw the Premier back to the question.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Premier, come back to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: Why is this project important? I remind the Leader of the Opposition it is bringing more renewable energy into our energy system. It will drive down power prices, which is what David Russell said this morning. He also went on to say that if he could, he would patent the approach of the SEC and apply it across the Asia-Pacific region. This is the advice of experts in the industry, and can I say those opposite privatised the SEC, opposed bringing back the SEC and clearly oppose investment in renewable energy.

Ministers statements: education

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:16): I rise to update the house on a big year for the Education State, thanks to the Allan Labor government, because it has been a big year for our schools – indeed it has been a big year for our Parliament.

Let us take the start of the year – we know a lot can happen in 12 months. We had a member for Western Metropolitan Region in the other place Mrs Deeming – she started teaching medieval gender studies, and she has finished teaching law, with a major in defamation. Let us fast-forward to our NAPLAN results: we have done so well in literacy, but also let us not forget numeracy. On this side of the house we already know three comes after two. And we can never forget the importance of doing your homework, particularly if it is a big assignment from, say, the electoral commission. You should get your assignment in on time.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Sandringham!

Ben CARROLL: It is good he is paying attention, because they could not open a school or cut a ribbon in a Lincraft shop. I am opening and cutting ribbons every second day.

Jacinta Allan: What about Spotlight? What have you got against Spotlight?

Ben CARROLL: Or Spotlight. And the member for Berwick will be very happy about what we have announced just recently: our pre-service teaching policy, which is giving students a job before they start teaching – like giving the member for Berwick a job in the chair before he officially gets the job.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Eureka can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, it is out of order to be using a ministers statement to attack the opposition.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed without warning. The Minister for Education to continue, without attacking the opposition.

Ben CARROLL: We have invested \$15 billion over the past nine years and built more schools than any other state.

Members interjecting.

Ben CARROLL: Are you all right? Are you sure? What I know, though, is I will be opening schools over summer. I do not know what the opposition leader will be doing. I know I will be back in this chair over summer when we come back for the new year. Who will be in that chair is the big question.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.

Ambulance services

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:19): My question is to the Minister for Health. In September Daryl Rowe was diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis at the Beechworth Health Service. He was forced to wait 5 hours for an ambulance to transfer him to Albury Base Hospital for urgent treatment. How many more Victorian lives will be put at risk before the government fixes the health crisis?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:20): I welcome the question from the member, and she referred to Daryl’s case that occurred in September of this year. I am very happy to follow up on the circumstances surrounding this case if the member for Lowan wants to share those details with me.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:20): In February the minister said that she had a ‘laser-like focus’ on improving the performance of Ambulance Victoria. Ambulance Victoria data released today shows that more than a third of life-threatening emergencies were not responded to within the target time frame. Why has the minister failed to ensure that Ambulance Victoria meets its performance targets?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:21): Once again, I thank the member for Lowan for her question. Let us be clear, Ambulance Victoria is responding to more code 1 call-outs than at any time ever in its history. Indeed demand for ambulance services is up 40 per cent on prepandemic levels. I do have a laser-like focus on improving ambulance response times. Again, I extend the offer to the member for Lowan to share the details of the case that she has raised in this house, and I am very happy to look into it and find out exactly what has happened. But let me say this, our government will continue to back in AV. We are working on the system reform that is required to ensure that we return our ambulance response times back to where they were – the best on record under the Andrews–Allan Labor government.

Ministers statements: health system

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:22): On this final sitting day I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government’s achievements in health over the past year and, let me tell you, there are very many. Our government will always back in our frontline healthcare workers, including our nurses and midwives, and that is why we have made it free to study nursing and midwifery in this state. Since coming to government we have grown our nursing workforce by a third, and we are committed to continuing this growth. That is why of course we have, as I have said, made it free to study nursing and midwifery. I am proud to inform the house that we are close to delivering 2100 undergraduate nursing and midwifery scholarships since that commitment was made. In other good news we have also funded an extra 221 graduate nursing and midwifery positions to help our nurses and midwives grow their careers. What is more, we have recruited over 2100 international workers to deliver the care Victorians need and deserve.

But there have also been a number of firsts this year, and I would like to tell you a little bit about those, including our nation-first public IVF services, our nation-first centre for paramedicine, our first women’s health clinics, our first rapid access hubs and our first women’s pain inquiry. We have delivered on our first pharmacy prescribing pilot, with over 600 pharmacies participating. Of course earlier this year we opened Australia’s first ever heart hospital – and I might say the first, not the third, because who would celebrate coming third? I know the good people of Mulgrave will be well served by their new member, the wonderful Eden Foster, who came first, not third, in the very recent by-election.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member South Barwon can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.

Land tax

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. Ahead of the last election the Treasurer promised that no Victorian should have to worry about feeding their family. A charity in Berwick has for decades supported the community with a free food pantry and outreach programs to people who are socially isolated. The government has issued them with a land tax assessment of \$552,142, which includes a substantial amount of penalty interest. How can the government be so callous as to put this food charity program for vulnerable families at risk this Christmas?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): I thank the member for Berwick – I was going to call you Gembrook, but it is Berwick – for his question. He has referred to a charitable organisation in his electorate providing food relief services for the local community. Can I thank the charity and no doubt the large number of volunteers they have supporting families in the local community for all the work they do every single day, like so many other food relief –

John Pesutto interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: I apologise that your colleagues are not listening to this important question and the answer. I apologise on your behalf for their rudeness to the member for Berwick.

Roma Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for South-West Coast, stop the running commentary.

Jacinta ALLAN: Food relief organisations are providing a really important role and a growing role at this time. Whether it is as a consequence of the numerous interest rate rises that we are experiencing –

Jess Wilson interjected.

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

Member for Kew withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: Families are experiencing a range of pressures at the moment, as I was saying. The consequences of successive interest rate rises are putting more and more pressure on families, just as they are on budgets everywhere. We have a range of programs –

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, the specific question here is around a \$552,000 tax bill sent to this organisation. We all understand the Premier is going down the path of ‘families are struggling with interest rate rises and other pressures’, yet the government are taxing them half a million dollars, which will close this food pantry. Can she please direct her answer to the question?

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

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was indicating, there are a range of food relief support services that we provide. There was funding in the budget for organisations like Foodbank and Foodshare. There are a whole range of organisations across the state.

In terms of the issue the member has raised regarding the land tax notification that has been provided to this organisation, I will ask the Treasurer to follow up directly with the member for Berwick in terms of the particular circumstances that have seen a notification of this size and type be presented to the organisation. If the member can provide details to the Treasurer in good faith, we are happy to work with him and the organisation on this situation.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:28): Just for clarification, the Treasurer is aware and is currently going to VCAT as you fight to make sure that this charity organisation pays their \$552,000. The charity donates time, volunteers support services, food and financial support to many families across Melbourne’s south-east. Is it government policy to target registered charities with tax bills of over half a million dollars?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:29): I thank the member for his supplementary question. Given the member is appearing to present a range of information to the house based on his knowledge, it is my advice that – and the member may already know this and wish to convey this – land is exempt from land tax if it is used and occupied by a charitable institution exclusively for charitable purposes. In good faith I have extended to the member for Berwick the opportunity to have further discussions with the government on this matter. We are happy to work with him, and I continue to note that we will continue to provide support to families. The member for Berwick may remember a time when he was part of a government that cut funding to Fresh Fruit Friday and the education maintenance allowance. That is a matter for him. We will continue to provide support to families.

Ministers statements: economy

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:30): I would like to start by –

A member interjected.

Tim PALLAS: Well, you could ask me a question any time you like.

I would like to start by wishing everybody a happy Ausmusic day, with or without the T-shirt. While the member for Hawthorn is still working on his debut EP, this government is delivering a greatest hits album. Let us start with the latest CommSec *State of the States*, which has the Victorian economy leading the nation. That is number one. As AC/DC tells us, ‘It’s a long way to the top.’ It is a particularly long way if you start from third, not first. From St Kilda to Kings Cross and beyond, this Labor government, the Allan Labor government, is delivering, and above all else we are delivering jobs from Warrnambool and the south-west, where the unemployment rate is just 0.9 per cent, to Bendigo, where the rate is 1.6 per cent, and right across Latrobe and Gippsland, where the rate is only 2.6 per cent. So things might be tough for those opposite but I echo the words of Crowded House and say to the member for Bulleen, ‘Don’t dream – it’s over’.

Meanwhile under our watch Victoria has returned to its rightful place as the engine room of Australian economic growth, with the *Deloitte Access Economics Business Outlook* report recently forecasting that growth in Victoria will outpace all other states over the next five years. 3.65 million Victorians currently have a job, meaning that since we came to office we have delivered 760,000 new jobs. Compare that to the forgotten years –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Frankston can leave the chamber for half an hour. There will be no one left on my right-hand side by the end of question time.

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, the Treasurer was forgetting a number there: a little less conversation, a little bit more action please would be my suggestion on behalf of the people of Victoria in relation to debt, deficit, interest repayments and any number of other things.

The SPEAKER: Order! I think I have heard that tune before, member for Sandringham.

Matt Fregon: On the point of order, Speaker, I think the point was that it was meant to be an Australian song.

The SPEAKER: Order! There are no points of order. The Treasurer to continue. He has 7 seconds, and he will be heard in silence.

Tim PALLAS: On the last sitting day of the year I would like to offer my best wishes to those opposite. To echo the words of INXS, ‘Don’t change’.

Water policy

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:34): My question is to the Premier. This morning the federal Parliament passed a new Murray–Darling Basin plan, a deal to return more water to our struggling river system, yet Victoria is the only state in the whole country that refuses to sign up to this deal. Our river system is in crisis, so why is Victoria refusing to sign up to a plan that is trying to save it?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:34): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. As someone who lives in the Murray–Darling Basin region, works in the Murray–Darling Basin region and represents the Murray–Darling Basin region, the future of the basin, the future of the environment, the future of the communities and the future of economic development in the basin are of particular concern and priority for me and for the government. That is why our water minister Minister

Shing in the other place has been firm and resolute in carrying forward a long-held policy position. I look across to the Leader of the National Party and I can see he is nodding in agreement. It has been a long-held position from Victoria that when it comes to the question of the allocation of the water resource, it is a precious and finite resource. It is a resource too, though, that rural communities rely on. They rely on it to have a safe and secure environment. Indigenous organisations rely on it to support the work they do in rehabilitating the land, and also industries – most notably industries like the dairy industry. But so many others also rely on a secure water supply to continue to employ people in our regions and in our communities. That is why we have been very clear with the federal government that the position that has been held for some time and represented by a range of water ministers – I think it started with you, Walshy, and it has been carried forward by other water ministers – is that we do have concerns about water buybacks. That is why we have historically insisted on the socio-economic impact assessment that is undertaken and needs to be part of any assessment about buybacks.

Now, we have done significant heavy lifting for a very long period of time here in Victoria. When we went through the millennium drought, the worst drought on record, we invested heavily – the former Labor government that I was proud to be part of – in water infrastructure. That was about saving water, making our channel systems more efficient so dairy farmers and producers could have security of supply, and also investing in water security so communities like Bendigo and Ballarat could have a security of supply. We are going to continue that position, member for Melbourne. We are not going to play politics with this issue. We are going to stand up for rural and regional communities, the environment and jobs, because this is a particularly important issue for our communities.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:37): My supplementary question is: because Victoria refuses to sign up to the plan, we are not only putting the river at risk but we also miss out on federal funding for regional communities that the Premier talks about who might be impacted by water buybacks. The federal Labor member for Bendigo – a seat which covers the Premier’s own electorate – recently said:

... I really hope my Labor colleagues in the Victorian government are listening and get on board with the plan.

Premier, will you listen to her and finally sign Victoria up to the plan, or is Labor in Victoria still intent on being in lock step with Barnaby Joyce and the Nationals when it comes to water policy?

The SPEAKER: Member for Melbourne, you asked two questions. Could you please reduce it to one question?

Ellen SANDELL: Premier, will you listen to your federal Labor member for Bendigo and finally sign Victoria up to the Murray–Darling Basin plan to save the river?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:38): I repeat: we do not support buybacks. We have been working very hard, as I have already outlined, for a long time – not the last 5 minutes, five months or 18 months – here in Victoria to invest in a secure water system for rural and regional communities. The member for Melbourne made reference to the former federal leader of the National Party. I am sure the member for Murray Plains could vouch for me when I say I have very rarely, if ever, been in lock step with Barnaby Joyce. The member for Murray Plains is my witness on that front. The Greens political party may want to play their political games from the inner city, but we are focused on supporting jobs. We are focused on supporting the environment, because without a secure water supply it is also the environment that can be damaged in the process.

Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

Lily D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:39): I rise to update the house on our big, big news about the big, big battery now being built by the SEC. This morning the Premier and I turned the first sod and began immediate construction on one of the biggest battery projects in the world, all thanks to the SEC. The SEC is partnering with Equis Australia to deliver the Melbourne renewable energy hub, with 1.6 gigawatt hours of renewable energy storage capacity. It will also store the surplus

renewable energy from the grid, firming up supply – enough to power more than 200,000 homes. It will enable around 1.5 gigawatts of new renewable energy projects to be built because of the firming capacity that the battery will provide across three of Victoria’s six renewable energy zones. The project will also of course create 155 jobs, including 14 apprenticeships and traineeships. The project would not have happened today without the SEC, and that is a fact – that is a fact. Managing director of Equis David Russell said it himself this morning for the world to hear. He also said, and I quote:

The partnership ... will result in more capacity being put into the system, which will drive down prices.

Because of the SEC, this project is happening sooner, it is bigger and it will support more renewables coming into the system. That means cheaper bills, because when surplus cheap renewable energy is stored in batteries, we can use that to avoid the reliance on expensive gas-fired electricity – because ultimately that is what consumers pay on their bills. It is as simple as that. Victorians voted for renewables, they voted to bring back the SEC and they also voted to get rid of the member for Hawthorn once. If he keeps this up, it might actually happen a second time or a third time. The SEC is well and truly back and for all Victorians, and that is what we have delivered today.

Public housing

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:41): At the recent Flemington towers community meeting –

The SPEAKER: Who is your question to?

Richard RIORDAN: My question is to the Premier.

Jacinta Allan: You get to look down for the day.

Richard RIORDAN: I did not want to miss it, Premier. At the recent Flemington towers community meeting I met Abbas. Abbas came to Australia as a refugee from Ethiopia. He has been waiting for public housing for 16 years. He has physical disabilities and requires 24/7 support. Ahead of the last election Labor promised that vulnerable Victorians would get the support they need and they want. Why has this government failed Abbas?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:42): I thank the member for Polwarth for his question, and as the Minister for Health before me this afternoon has done and as I have done previously in the house, if the member wishes to provide additional information and detail about Abbas and his particular set of circumstances we are happy to follow that up with the housing minister and the relevant housing organisation. We have made this offer to every question that has been put to us by those opposite when individual case studies have been put forward. I acknowledge the member for Gippsland South, who has provided – I think it was Gippsland South – details of a young woman from Sale referred to earlier in the week in the house who had particular housing challenges, but on no other occasion this week or last week –

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is actually misleading the house. I sent her an email about the issue that I raised.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, Leader of the Nationals.

Peter Walsh interjected.

The SPEAKER: It is not a point of order.

A member interjected.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come to order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Also, the member referenced that he was on a public housing tower site. The example he has offered is exactly why we are, through the housing statement, undertaking the largest urban regeneration project of our public housing estate to build more homes. Now, I note for the member for Polwarth that the Greens political party have been active in their opposition to this

program of urban renewal and building more homes. I would hope he was not as well, because if he genuinely wants to work with the government on how we can build more homes, more social and affordable homes, then we would be delighted if the member for Polwarth would show the leadership that is far lacking in other parts of his party room in terms of supporting the construction –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is now debating the question on an important matter, and she is doing herself a disservice.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister! I would ask members, if they are raising points of order, to be succinct. There is no need for added commentary. The Premier to continue answering the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: Again I reiterate to the member for Polwarth: should he provide us with further information, we will follow up the issue of Abbas and come back to him.

Roma Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:46): If it pleases the Speaker, I can table for the Premier Abbas's application. After 16 years I am sure there are multiple copies in the department.

The SPEAKER: Do you have supplementary question, member for Polwarth?

Richard RIORDAN: I do have a supplementary, but I table it for the benefit of the Premier. My supplementary question is: Abbas has to leave his temporary accommodation in January 2024. He will then be homeless. Why does Abbas, like over 65,000 other Victorians who need public housing, have to suffer because of this government's failure to manage the housing crisis?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:46): Again, we will follow up the individual case that the member for Polwarth has referred to. But I will also say to the member for Polwarth that when it comes to investing in social and affordable housing, when it comes to investing in public housing – housing that is supported by the government – it takes a sustained effort. That is why, through the Big Housing Build and the regional housing build, significant funds are being put into the construction of thousands and thousands more homes, and that is in stark, stark contrast to every single Liberal budget that cut funding to the housing budget.

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier knows that her government since 2018 has only created 1375 extra homes –

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order, member for Polwarth.

Richard Riordan interjected.

The SPEAKER: It is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, every single budget between 2010 and 2014 cut funding to the housing budget.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Polwarth's question had a preface that Abbas is being forced out of his housing in January. I ask you to bring the Premier back to Abbas's circumstances.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I was referring to sustained effort. Sustained effort in supporting public housing is not standing on the back of a ute in Hawthorn opposing public housing developments.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narre Warren South can leave the chamber for half an hour. It is very unlike you, member for Narre Warren South.

Member for Narre Warren South withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: economy

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:49): For our Labor government, a strong economy is about jobs – supporting jobs in our community. It is about jobs that support people to have a fulfilling career and jobs that provide training and skilled pathways and also, importantly, give families the confidence that they have got those important paybacks coming home every single week. When CommSec says we are the strongest performing economy in the nation, that is important because that means we are supporting more and more jobs in our community. I am proud to say we currently have a record number of Victorians in work. In just the last three years over half a million jobs have been created here in Victoria. That means there are half a million people in work supporting their families to get ahead. What we have seen too is the unemployment rate reflect this effort. In regional Victoria our unemployment rate is the equal lowest in the country, at 2.8 per cent. For the record, our overall unemployment rate is 3.8 per cent.

What you are seeing as you travel around the state is that there is a big program in jobs. There is the work we are doing in building more houses. We have to knock down the blockers and the opposers over there and get on and build more homes for more Victorians. Our investment in removing level crossings, building the Metro Tunnel and supporting suburban road and rail is about jobs, and our big hospital building agenda, our school building agenda, our sports infrastructure agenda are also about supporting jobs. I want to thank, on one job, the bipartisan support of those opposite – they are helping us find people a job. I quote the *Australian* today:

The Victorian Liberal Party is providing work for the otherwise unemployable.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for looking after his own job.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, I have got a number of unanswered questions: number 314 for the Minister for Environment, which was due two months ago; number 344 for the Minister for Police; number 354 for the Minister for Environment; number 381 for the Premier; number 384 for the Minister for Public and Active Transport; and, seeing as the government wants to keep spruiking housing, one for the Minister for Housing, number 214, which was due four months ago.

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Speaker, I have the following questions on notice that are missing and well overdue: question 619 to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, three months overdue; questions 613, 615, 616 and 617 to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, three months overdue; and for the Minister for Regional Development, questions 515, 517, 610 and 611, which are three and five months overdue. I do ask that the ministers answer the questions and not give me press statements. Do you want me to give that to –

The SPEAKER: That is entirely up to you, member for Narracan.

Chris Crewther: On a point of order, Speaker, I have a couple of outstanding questions. The first is adjournment question 379, due on 16 November, asking the Premier to investigate how the government can better support local community members impacted by recent events in Israel and Gaza, including by ensuring the safety of our Jewish community and the investigation, arrest, charging and prosecution of those inciting violence, supporting proscribed terrorist organisation Hamas or engaging in any other potential criminal activity – particularly pertinent right now. The other question is constituency question 286, due on 16 September, to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC about unfair WorkSafe bills and claim cost rates made on behalf of Paul, a local in my electorate in the carpeting industry, and other affected locals.

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Speaker, I bring to the house's attention question 409, asked on 31 October to the Minister for Emergency Services; question 399, asked on 19 October to the Minister for Environment; and question 385, asked on 18 October to the Minister for Education – all of which are adjournments. The responses are overdue from the ministers, and I ask that the Speaker investigate those and provide a prompt response to the constituents who are affected by those questions. As the Minister for Education would appreciate, it is always best to start your summer holiday homework early.

Tim Read: On a point of order, Speaker, I have two overdue responses: one adjournment, number 397, for the Minister for Mental Health; and one constituency question, number 376, for the Minister for Industrial Relations.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:55): I have reviewed yesterday's constituency questions. The member for Kororoit sought an update and therefore an action from the Minister for Skills and TAFE, and I therefore rule her question out of order.

Constituency questions

South-West Coast electorate

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:55): (460) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: why is the state government failing in its obligation to ensure South-West Coast roadsides are safe for road users and maintained ahead of the peak fire season? The Department of Transport and Planning claims responsibility for coordinating state government bodies, local government and CFA to work cohesively to manage roadside vegetation for bushfire preparedness and road safety risk. For the last seven years I have attended the emergency management commissioner's briefings armed with feedback from South-West Coast residents, CFA volunteers and local government who are concerned with overgrown and dangerous roadside vegetation and hamstrung to act due to bureaucracy. In 2018 the St Patrick's Day fires saw overgrown roadside vegetation act as a wick and carry bushfire through the region, and we do not want to see a repeat. Preventative management is part of the state government's role, and I look forward to being provided with the South-West Coast roadside vegetation management strategy ahead of the peak fire season.

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:56): (461) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police. On behalf of my constituents I am seeking increased enforcement of speed limits on Hilton Street and Widford Street in Glenroy. I therefore ask the minister: what can Victoria Police do to prioritise the enforcement of speed limits on these roads? In the Glenroy community Facebook chat, excessive speed along Hilton Street and Widford Street is often raised. Residents are concerned for the safety of themselves and their children. I can personally attest to witnessing irresponsible driving and excessive speeding behaviours along these two roads. Hilton Street is a council road, and residents are also asking for increased enforcement via mobile speed cameras or other measures to help reduce speeds and increase safety. For many years I have also been advocating for councils to install a pedestrian crossing on Hilton Street, and I am very pleased to see this finally being built. Being able to safely cross the road is fundamental to the livability of our suburbs and the health and wellbeing of our residents.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:57): (462) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place, and my question is: what has happened to the new Charlton CFA station? Recently the historic Charlton post office burnt down. The response from the Charlton CFA and surrounding CFA brigades, as well as from FRV in Bendigo, was excellent, and I would like to thank all of our

firefighters. They should be congratulated and celebrated. However, the very visible activity of our firefighters and the exit of the new Charlton CFA tanker from Walsh Motors, where it is paying rent to live at the moment, raised a question within the community: where is the new Charlton CFA station? It was in the *Charlton Community Plan* in 2017, which states:

- A alternative site at the former NCCC site has been secured.
- The construction of a new station will not commence until at least the 2017/2018 financial year.

This community deserves and desperately need a fire station that can house all of their appliances, so we are asking: what has happened?

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (14:58): (463) My question is for the Minister for Planning and relates to the second dwelling, granny flat planning reforms announced by the Allan Labor government. How will the planning reforms in *Victoria's Housing Statement* support their construction and housing in my electorate of Bass, which covers three council areas, being Casey, Cardinia and Bass Coast? The statement sets a bold target to build 800,000 new homes over the next 10 years, and those in my community that can are ready and keen to get going and very much welcome the changes in the rules in order to build a second home on their property without a planning permit. It means extra space for your family and somewhere for the kids to stay as well. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Sandringham electorate

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:59): (464) My constituency question is for the Minister for Ports and Freight. I am pleased that after five years of advocacy in this place on behalf of my local community, work has finally commenced on replacing Hampton Pier. On the back of 4000 local signatures it is a win for local residents to replace, finally, this very important piece of community infrastructure. This will of course ensure a safer environment for water activities during the fast-approaching summer months. The minister's announcement earlier this month provides no certainty on a time line for when designs, planning and procurement are to be completed throughout the time ahead, and I therefore ask the minister: when will a project time line be provided to the community with deadlines for designs, contracts and the completion of the new Hampton Pier?

Box Hill electorate

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (15:00): (465) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and I ask: what progress is being made on the Box Hill–Hawthorn cycling trail? There is currently no dedicated safe cycling path linking suburbs such as Surrey Hills, Box Hill and Blackburn to the CBD. Cyclists currently either need to detour north to the Koonung Creek Trail or south to the Gardiners Creek Trail or ride along busy roads such as Mont Albert Road. The Box Hill–Hawthorn trail route has been designated as a strategic cycling corridor by the Allan government and once built will deliver healthier and safer outcomes for cyclists throughout the Box Hill electorate. There continues to be strong support throughout my community for improved bicycle infrastructure, and the construction of this path will fill an important gap in Melbourne's cycling network. I look forward to the minister's response.

Warrandyte electorate

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (15:01): (466) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I ask the minister: when will the government make Jumping Creek Road in the electorate of Warrandyte safe for the constituents? John Burnett recently wrote to me about the fast-deteriorating condition of Jumping Creek Road. He said:

Today, I counted over a dozen decent sized pot-holes over its length of about three kilometres, principally occurring around the eastern, or Wonga Park end of the road. The holes are so large that traffic is swerving to

attempt to avoid the potential damage to vehicles, with the consequence that drivers' attention is being distracted and cars are veering to the opposite side of the road.

He informs me that the council has been filling in these potholes almost every six months and that the whole road needs to be resurfaced as soon as possible to put an end to this dangerous situation.

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (15:01): (467) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing, and my question is: what are the future plans for the public housing buildings on Eric Street in West Preston? The site on Eric Street is about 3000 square metres. It has two buildings there that were built in the 1960s. They have 21 dwellings in them each. It is no secret locally that the number of tenants in the buildings has been decreasing steadily in recent years. Many of the dwellings are abandoned. Some of them have been used by squatters recently. Some of them have caught fire and have not been repaired. We doorknocked Eric Street last year. We have been asking for information on behalf of local residents since then. We look forward to working with the minister to ensure the site is put to good use to continue to support the provision of high-quality public housing in Preston.

Prahran electorate

Sam HIBBINS (Prahran) (15:02): (468) I have been asking local residents what questions they would like to see me ask, so I ask this constituency question to the Premier on behalf of Daniel from Prahran. The Prahran electorate is home to some of the most privileged in our society as well as some of the most needy. There are few other areas in Victoria where the contrast between those who are doing well, those who are doing okay and those who are doing not so well at all is so stark. We face a cost-of-living crisis fuelled by greedy and unreasonable rent increases and a marked deterioration of healthcare services which are free and accessible. We are a progressive bunch, and I believe we all want to live in a community where we can live affordably, harmoniously and happily. This is increasingly at risk. So I ask: how can the government assure residents of Prahran that they take seriously the cost-of-living crisis, including local rents and access to affordable health care?

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (15:03): (469) My question is for the Minister for Environment. How many containers have been recycled through the container deposit scheme in my electorate of the Bellarine since the scheme began on 1 November. The container deposit scheme offers a great opportunity, an incentive for recycling, reducing waste and creating economic opportunities within Victoria by creating over 600 jobs. The scheme is also offering local community groups, sporting clubs and charities a new way to raise money for their organisation, while supporting the environment and teaching people about the importance of recycling. In my electorate of the Bellarine we currently have two reverse vending machines, one in Leopold and the other one in Ocean Grove, as well as over-the-counter deposits in Portarlington and Point Lonsdale. I have already seen many people in my electorate taking up this opportunity at various sites. As we come to the end of the first month of this scheme, I am very proud of my electorate's involvement. I look forward to hearing the figure of the containers that have been deposited from the minister.

Bills

Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (15:04): In continuance, I fully support any measures that we can adopt to improve our countering violent extremism laws which identify and address the root causes and factors that lead to radicalisation, prevent individuals and groups from engaging in acts of terrorism, protect lives and communities and preserve our national security, particularly given what

we have seen recently with our Jewish Australian community as well as with visitors who have been targeted. Indeed a Jewish friend of mine has said to me on this matter:

I'm of course concerned about the massive rise in antisemitism.

The indoctrination in schools ... telling children to go to pro Hamas rallies & encourage hatred against Jews.

Just yesterday I joined the Israeli family and friends of victims murdered, harmed or taken hostage by Hamas who flew all the way to Australia to speak with us. It was so moving to hear their stories, and I call on and hope for the release of all remaining hostages held by Hamas. After spending time with the Israeli family and friends of victims murdered, harmed or taken hostage by Hamas yesterday, it was shocking, though, to see them blocked from entering their hotel last night by masked protesters and then having to be holed up for their own protection in a local police station for a few hours while the hotel was cleared. It was disgraceful to do this to these people who have already been through so much, and it brings to the fore the significance of this bill and protecting vulnerable individuals from violent extremists.

Again, it also brings to the fore the need for reinstated move-on laws, as we have debated in this chamber, and it brings to the fore the need for more police, but instead we have a police staffing crisis brought on by this government's mismanagement and inaction, with many local police stations being forced to reduce reception hours and more, such as Mornington station going down from 24 to 16 hours from Sunday through to Wednesday and Hastings police station going down from 24 hours to 16 hours all week.

While the coalition have taken the position not to oppose this bill, I again call the government to take further action to protect our communities, particularly our local Jewish community, who are feeling particularly targeted at this moment.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (15:07): I rise to make a contribution on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. Before I get into it, I would like to address the contribution by the member for Malvern just before the lunchbreak. He started off okay, but then frankly it descended into a very partisan and militant speech where he accused this government of under-resourcing Victoria Police. I think those claims would have some credibility if you had forgotten about the fact that it was this government that invested \$4.5 billion in more than 3600 additional police. Perhaps his claims would have credibility if you forgot about the fact that under this government Victoria Police is the largest police force in the country, and perhaps his claims would have more credibility if you forgot about the fact that when the member for Malvern was Treasurer of this state \$100 million was ripped out of Victoria Police and not a single new police officer was funded by those opposite. I would appeal to those opposite –

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, there is an important debate to be had today, not a critique and a sledging of former ministers of this place. I just draw the member back to it.

Nick STAIKOS: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, it is a ludicrous point of order because there are members of the house who have been talking about police resources and, frankly, spreading misinformation about this government's proud record on police resourcing. The member for Mornington, who just proceeded this contribution, went to that exact matter.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): I will rule on the point of order. There is no point of order.

Nick STAIKOS: Of course there is no point of order. These people are clowns. But I will get into –

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it might be appropriate that that commentary be withdrawn. The member was being disrespectful to the opposition.

Nick STAIKOS: For the benefit of the house I withdraw that they are clowns.

This bill is very important legislation because it goes to integrity in Victoria Police. Victoria Police is one of our most important, one of our most trusted institutions in this state. It is not only about addressing crime. It is also about community safety; it is also about community harmony. Victoria Police play an important role in our state in maintaining the social cohesion of our state. As I pointed out earlier in this contribution, we have a very, very large police force in this state, and I would like to put on record my appreciation for Victoria Police, particularly those police members in the southern metropolitan division, most particularly in Glen Eira and Kingston, who I have the privilege of working closely with – all of our constables, our senior constables, our senior sergeants, our district inspectors and our superintendent. They are all top-class people who slog their guts out to make sure that our community is kept safe, day in, day out. Particularly in the City of Glen Eira, I know that our police members are working doubly hard to ensure that our community is kept safe during some difficult times.

But when we talk about a bill like this, which is about integrity, it is about the public having faith in Victoria Police, which is very, very important. This bill addresses that in a number of different ways – for example, codifying the Victoria Police code of conduct. This bill formally enshrines the Chief Commissioner of Police's ability to issue a code of conduct to Victoria Police that is binding on Victoria Police personnel. It also allows for non-compliance of that code to be considered a breach of discipline that comes with explicit repercussions, and these changes are made to uphold the behavioural standards of Victoria Police.

In addition, this bill also allows discipline inquiry officers to request an independent medical assessment to determine an officer's fitness, both physical and mental, to partake in disciplinary hearings, and this will ensure that adjournments are reserved for those who need it most and remove lengthy and costly delays. In addition to that, this bill also introduces a non-exhaustive list of conditions for good behaviour bonds, ensuring that officers who have breached discipline or committed an offence are aware of the expectations set by the bond. Notably this includes provisions for drug and alcohol testing.

This bill acknowledges that police and PSOs deal at times with very sensitive information. It acknowledges that fact and extends the statute of limitations for offences related to the misuse of police information from 12 months to three years. I understand that in many cases where misuse of sensitive information has occurred, it has not been uncovered until after 12 months, so this is very much an important reform to ensure that we are dealing with sensitive information appropriately.

This bill also makes some amendments to the Firearms Act 1996, and I would just say at the outset that the gun laws of this country are world renowned, and our gun safety culture is a point of national pride. Many of us have friends and family in the United States. I certainly have a number of friends in the United States, and one thing, as great as that country is, that many of us will never understand is their gun culture. Our gun safety laws are a point of national pride. They are something that unite our country, and we must always jealously guard the bipartisanship that we have when it comes to our gun safety laws.

Since the middle of 2021 a permanent national firearms amnesty has been in place, and that amnesty implores members of the public to anonymously surrender any illegal or unregistered firearms, parts or ammunition in their possession without fear of prosecution. This amendment to the Firearms Act actually improves the way in which that is conducted, because in support of that amnesty this bill allows a licensed firearms dealer to receive, accept or take possession of a firearm from an unlicensed person. The firearm can then be registered, destroyed or sold. This bill removes concerns that licensed firearms dealers may have with participating in the amnesty by formalising their ability to accept firearms from an unlicensed person. The bill goes further to place a special condition on the holder of the category A or A and B long arm firearm licence. Holders of such firearms cannot carry these or use a detachable magazine greater than five shots in combination with a bolt action shotgun, unless participating in a chief commissioner approved event.

Finally, in addition to these Firearms Act amendments, the bill increases Victoria Police's ability to keep our roads and community safe by making amendments to vehicle immobilising devices such as tyre-deflating road spikes. Victoria Police currently has limited power to use VIDs and may only use them in situations where they are trying to prevent a driver from escaping custody or avoiding arrest and to stop a moving vehicle in limited circumstances. The bill allows for more situations in which a VID may be used. Police will now be able to use them if they think a driver may harm themselves, a police officer or someone else. This applies when someone is driving or tries to drive a car. Police officers will be required to take reasonable steps to inform a driver that the immobilising device has been deployed.

The final amendment as part of this bill: the bill makes amendments to the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 to provide a stronger response to risks of violent extremism that are currently being hindered by flow-of-information problems. It is a bill that makes a number of different amendments to different acts of Parliament. They are commonsense amendments, and they enhance and complement an existing integrity regime around Victorian Police but also our gun safety laws. I commend the bill to the house, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:16): I am more than happy to rise today to speak to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I am more than happy every time I get to support our Victoria Police members. I work very closely with them in all of our communities, and this is a good opportunity to tell some stories. We will get to that. As the member for Bentleigh just pointed out, there is a fair bit to this bill. It introduces a range of policing reforms which are aimed at strengthening the integrity of the Victoria Police discipline system and supporting VicPol and other agencies to help them maintain community safety – which they do each and every day. In the electorate of Mildura there are 13 single-man stations – the most of any electorate in Victoria – 13 of them, and some of them are really isolated. The people that are there, though, those Victoria Police members that man these single-man police stations, are the spine –

Katie Hall: And women.

Jade BENHAM: A couple of women – I am going to tell a story about Annie, who mans – or womans – the Culgoa –

A member: Staffs.

Jade BENHAM: Staffs. She is the member at Culgoa, which covers an incredible amount of area geographically. I will get to Annie very, very soon. But I did want to send a shout-out to all of those members – and the PSOs here of course who keep us safe each and every day – and those in the larger stations like Robinvale. Unfortunately in a town of 8000 people we do have a few on the roster but are still unable to staff the Robinvale police station 24 hours a day. There is a large catalogue of Victoria Police housing there too which needs maintenance, as they do, but it is hard to come by. Superintendent John O'Connor, local area commander Michelle Young and I work closely together. I get regular updates from them, and like I said, I am happy to support them in any way I can. So I am very, very happy to rise to speak on this today. But those single-staff police stations out in the bush – the people that staff them are the heart and soul, the spine, the stomach and everything out in these communities. Antoinette Coobs, better known as Annie, is the member at the Culgoa station. She is out and about all the time. I do not quite know how she does it. She seems to be able to be in several places at once. On Remembrance Day I was heading back from Charlton through Wycheproof and stopped off at the bakery, and Annie was there. Of course a quick hello that should have taken 2 minutes turned into about an hour – talking to Annie about all sorts of things around the district. She knows it like the back of her hand.

She is an incredible, incredible member of Victoria Police. I want to sincerely thank Annie Coobs for everything she does in Culgoa, Wycheproof, Charlton and Sea Lake. Like I said, she is everywhere – and that is a fair amount of country to cover, so thank you. She is also a very good netball umpire,

which is how I got to know her in the first place, and a very, very good netballer too. I do not know if she still playing, but in her day she was very, very good.

Like I said, the community engagement from the larger station, with the resources to have members that are dedicated to community engagement, is vital. Lauren Harmer and Nick Raynor in Mildura are everywhere. I will quite often ask Lauren if she is following me around, because it seems like that sometimes. They do an incredible amount of work, particularly with some of the issues we have around antisocial behaviour, youth justice and youth crime at the moment. They are in the Langtree Mall, they are staging Coffee with a Cop, they are there; there is just a police presence in the places that they need to be. They are such a cohesive group. I even saw Loz on the breatho the other day. You know, people are off with sickness and other things, but they are flexible and they are team players, and I cannot thank our local Victoria Police members enough for all that they do. When I get up to talk about any bills in this place, there are usually stories that I can relate that do relate to my electorate. This is one of them, and I just want to support our Victoria Police members again.

A quick word on the Firearms Act 1996, which this bill will amend to allow licensed firearm dealers to receive, accept or take possession of a firearm from unlicensed persons who are not exempt from the Firearms Act for the purposes of sale and registration. The member for Bentleigh spoke before – and I have previously lived in the USA – about the lack of gun laws there. One thing that I think Australia is very, very proud of is our gun laws. Even coming from a rural property there was no argument. I remember the 1990s very well. I remember when John Howard brought those laws in – I am not too young to remember; I hold my age very well – very, very clearly. I was at school, and coming from a rural property, obviously firearms were part of life. From a young age my cousins that were boys were allowed to have a slug gun; I was not, probably for good reason. They were a part of life, but when Port Arthur occurred, there was not, from my memory, at least in our area, any pushback; it made sense. Having lived in the US, and with my husband about to travel to the US, the lack of gun laws in the US is frightening, so anything we can do to strengthen our gun laws I am absolutely happy to support.

I actually did my firearm safety course recently, because again, on a rural property you have to get a gun licence, you have to get a gun safe. I have not got my own firearm yet, but it has been on the Christmas list for a long time, so we will see. I am not going to hold my breath. But the delivery of the firearm safety course, the longarm for category A and B, is really thorough, and if you do not pass – it is one of those things. I have got lots of licences: boat licences, cars, forklifts, all that kind of thing. The firearms licensing in Victoria is so far – and I am happy to be corrected – the only test that I have taken where they actually make you take the test and you have to get 100 per cent and you only get two goes at it. If not, then you have to do the whole course again, and there are complementary practical courses. So like I said, it is well worth it. Gun safety is paramount everywhere in Victoria, particularly on rural properties, where we use them for game, pest control et cetera. I am happy to support anything that does strengthen our firearms legislation and any legislation that does support Victoria Police, as I have said. It will hopefully help them to keep us safe.

I was going to keep this brief – I say this every time, but I have not managed to keep it brief. Any legislation to support VicPol will hopefully help them keep us safe and keep my family and your family safe. I would like to finally take this opportunity to send my very best festive wishes to all of the VicPol members throughout my electorate and throughout Victoria more broadly, and to the PSOs too, and thank them for their service.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:25): Thank you, Acting Speaker Tak. Great to see you in the chair. It is great to speak and rise on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. It is a really important bill around a range of matters, but particularly the focus on our disciplinary system and oversight of Victoria Police and the integrity and confidence that that provides to our local communities. It is important to reflect on this bill where Victoria Police is up to at the moment. It is a significantly changing, evolving environment, complex in its operations. We extend our gratitude to our serving police members. I had the opportunity with the Minister for Police to connect with Springvale police recently, and then previously with Cheltenham and Mordialloc police,

and many of those members are locals serving our community each and every day. With the challenges that they face, particularly around recruitment and an ageing workforce as well, we extend our great gratitude and appreciation for the work that they do each and every day.

The member for Mildura made some points around single-person stations. We have had some changes in our area where we have capacity issues. Some of that is through attrition that we have seen, and some of the challenges that we have faced around the pandemic, and then staff recruitment. The academy is absolutely full each and every graduation – the minister has talked about that. We want to encourage more people in. It is a great way to serve your community and to give back, law enforcement, so we want to see more people come through. But it is challenging across our emergency services. I know in mental health and health infrastructure it is a challenge across the sector. But there is not a lack of effort or a lack of investment being made in Victoria Police. It is worth noting the Chief Commissioner of Police at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on single-officer stations said police:

... will be always stationed and gazetted to their single-officer police stations.

The police commissioner went on to say:

So the reality is, for us, no community is going to be any worse off, and we are not moving those members. I can give you that assurance.

It is important to place on the record the assurance to the community in that space. It is a challenging time at the moment, but each and every day our Victoria Police members are fronting up and supporting and serving their communities.

I had the opportunity to serve on the IBAC oversight committee, which really gave you an insight into the confidence of the community in policing, the complaints process, and for those serious allegations or conduct matters, the oversight that IBAC places in that space. It is worth reflecting that in the most recent calendar year, of the complaints that have been made to IBAC, some 68 per cent of all complaints received – or about 1900 – related to Victoria Police. There are also attitude surveys. I am comforted by the snapshot of Victoria Police perceptions around corruption, particularly that more than 95 per cent – almost all Victoria Police employees – agree that they know the behaviour that constitutes corruption, and a significant majority have a good understanding of what IBAC does and the oversight as well.

When we think about the oversight, the discipline and trust and confidence that is provided, there is the internal investigative frame, and a range of different legal centres and organisations have shared their views on the interaction between IBAC and Victoria Police. All in all, the serious corrupt conduct and issues that are referred to IBAC, where it needs that greater oversight, are done well with IBAC and resourced well. I remember being briefed that 40 per cent of the work that IBAC does is related to Victoria Police and that oversight, so we have a really important system. We have increased funding to those agencies as well. But then the disciplinary changes in the act and in the bill are important to again strengthen that trust and confidence for the more than 20,000 employees in Victoria Police that deliver policing services each and every day. Amazingly, it is around 14,000 interactions with members of the public each and every day.

With these amendments, I am particularly interested in and welcome the work that has been done around Victoria Police where there is a disciplinary matter or capacity discussions. Whether that is physical or mental health and wellbeing, that can be part of that process, one, to test capacity, but also two, to make sure that we are supporting and looking after Victoria Police members. I think that oversight is an important consideration as well. I am really heartened – this is a really important thing for trust and confidence in community. The bill in part of its amendments will also ensure that a breach of Victoria Police's code of conduct is a breach of discipline. There is no grey area in that space. The trust and confidence that comes from a conduct issue is in that disciplinary frame. That is, importantly, lifting the standards and our understanding as well.

I also note that there is an extension to the statute of limitations from 12 months to three years. With the really privileged access to information that Victoria Police officers get, the fact that there is an extension of that time frame is really important to ensure that some of the delicate information that is received is treated with the greatest protection.

There are a couple of other important regulations that I want to go to in these amendments. There are amendments to the Road Safety Act 1986 around when vehicle-immobilising devices can be deployed. You breathe in when you think of the interactions Victoria Police have each and every day in dangerous parts of our community and on high-speed roads – interactions with motorists by our vehicle safety traffic teams that go out each and every day. We have seen harrowing consequences from accidents and through impacts from Victoria Police members that we have lost on our roads. For their safety and the safety of Victorians, when they front up each and every day and put themselves in harm's way for the protection and betterment of their fellow Victorians, we will make sure they have every resource and can make every decision almost instantaneously, in the moment, especially when they have got high-speed traffic interceptions or risks to communities coming through. We need to make sure that there is every bit of power and support and protection there.

This change is through the presence of the reasonable suspicion requirement – lowering that standard so they can make decisions in the field to make sure that people are protected. Previously they could only employ those immobilising devices when they were trying to prevent a driver from escaping custody or avoiding arrest or in stopping a moving vehicle in limited circumstances. There will now be a presence of reasonable suspicion requirement, ensuring the right balance is struck between increasing community safety and the right of individuals. That is a practical, operational decision that requires a change to the Road Safety Act. Each and every day there are interactions with Victorians on the roads, and we have seen instances where police are put in a high degree of danger with tragic consequences. Victoria Police have the right to be safe in their workplace, out in our communities, while they are protecting Victorians each and every day.

The other really important thing is the amendment to the Terrorist (Community Protection) Act 2003. Victorians have been touched by the impact of terrorism. We have seen tragic loss of life in our communities and impact through the radicalisation of individuals. Our counterterrorism federal agencies, Victoria Police and their associated partners in the Department of Justice and Community Safety each and every day are privy to information that would be extremely confronting to Victorians. They protect us and have intercepted, we know, quite substantial risk and have diverted impacts at the MCG from proposed terrorist incidents and also from Anzac Day incidents, which thankfully Victorians were never impacted by. That information sharing of an understanding of how people radicalise and go towards extremism is so critical to community safety. It is the unseen critical work that they do. They can never talk about their work, but they are some of the best Victorians that you could ever meet. They are protecting and overseeing us each and every day to make sure we are safe, understanding the root causes of extremism and using those diversion programs and early intervention that are so critical in a community safety context – understanding how it comes to be and then dealing with and responding to those challenges. A lot of the time you see it through education, engagement and awareness through those deradicalisation programs. But we cannot let bureaucratic mistakes and a lack of sharing information risk the lives of Victorians. This is a practical measure that has come out of the countering violent extremism multi-agency panel. We thank them for the work that they do and the recommendations they have provided. This is a smart amendment that makes sure time-critical information is shared so we understand the root causes of radicalisation and provide early intervention. This is an important bill, and I commend it to the house.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (15:35): If the house will indulge me, I will first just pay tribute to our colleague, and now nearly former colleague, Matt Bach in the other place – he has just completed his valedictory speech, which was as brilliant as he has been a parliamentarian, and I thank him for his work in my region.

Today I rise to speak in support of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. This extensive piece of legislation encompasses various facets of our legal system, primarily focusing on fortifying the integrity of the Victoria Police disciplinary system and safeguarding the welfare of our community.

Policing runs deep in my family. My father-in-law Lance Werner had a remarkable 38-year career as a member of the Victorian police. As a senior sergeant, Lance went beyond duty, taking on roles in emergency management training and serving as the Wangaratta inspector. He was a pioneer as one of the first family violence advisers, showcasing his commitment to critical societal issues. In various roles from constable to senior constable, Lance exhibited versatility in uniform duties, traffic management and criminal investigations. His contributions, though humble, were of significant public interest, leaving an indelible mark on the communities that he served. He even spent a bit of time doing training for my honourable friend the member for Benambra Mr Bill Tilley, who was one of the members that walked me in on my first day when I was sworn into Parliament only three short months ago. As Lance has entered a well-deserved retirement from the police force, I express my deep gratitude for his sacrifices, courage and unwavering commitment to the values of Victoria Police and to him. He is a symbol of service, integrity and resilience.

Our policing history goes back another generation to Lance's father Vaughan Werner. Vaughan, at the age of about 35, took on a monumental responsibility as he led the Australian government team providing aid to the PNG police force for almost three years. In various roles he served as the assistant commissioner, serving under Chief Commissioner of Police Kel Glare. He served as the first superintendent of the drug squad and chief inspector overseeing the air wing, search and rescue and water police. His versatility and dedication left a lasting impact.

It is at this point that I would love to acknowledge also the Community Advocacy Alliance Inc, led by Kel Glare, who was granddad's chief commissioner in his day. They are an organisation committed to providing benevolent support to those adversely affected by the government of the day, whether it be either side, its bureaucracies and agencies. It was established in 2015 after a mutual friend put former police chief commissioner Kel Glare AO APM and former police inspector Ivan Ray in touch again after many years on the premise that they had a lot in common and should have a chat. Their mission is rooted in the principles of justice, community safety and the protection of individual freedoms under the rule of law. It was my privilege and is my privilege to be involved with the CAA, as they are known colloquially, and I have visited the group and seen their advocacy, and I thank them for their work.

I also pay tribute to this distinguished figure Kel Glare, who served in the Victoria Police force for 35 years, retiring as chief commissioner. His commitment to law and order, coupled with his legal expertise, makes him a driving force behind the CAA's mission. Kel is an active public speaker and community safety advocate alongside Ivan Ray, who is the CAA's chief executive officer, executive secretary and co-founder. There are many more that I could mention, but for the sake of time I will leave it at that, and I do thank the CAA for all of their fantastic work.

It is my family's proud history in policing that makes me so passionate about the changes being brought in today. The bill before us introduces significant changes to the Victoria Police Act 2013, incorporating the police code of conduct into legislation to underscore the importance of compliance for Victoria Police personnel. Additionally, the amendments address aspects such as medical assessments of fitness, conditions for breaches of discipline or offences and the establishment of a restorative engagement and redress scheme for current and former members of Victoria Police personnel. Unauthorised access, use and disclosure of police information are also addressed to safeguard sensitive data.

Importantly, this bill does not want to presuppose or put forth a suggestion that our Victorian police officers are not like my father-in-law and characters of the highest calibre that put themselves in harm's way to make sure that we get to live our lives safely. This point was especially important in my recent

meeting at Warrandyte police station, where I had the pleasure of meeting with Sergeant Stewart Henderson, station commander at Warrandyte police station, who has been on the job for 10 years now; Inspector Carlie Kohler, local area commander; and Acting Senior Sergeant Janine Saunders, the officer in charge at Doncaster Police.

Warrandyte police station and Doncaster police station have been making significant strides in community engagement, exemplified by their recent neighbourhood policing forum. This initiative reflects their commitment to fostering open communication channels between law enforcement and the communities they diligently serve. It was good to hear that they share my concerns about the dangerous five-ways intersection and the need to fix this. As my colleagues know, this has been a persistent issue compounded by a tragic fatal accident a couple of years ago. What is equally troubling to me are the near misses that continue to occur, prompting heightened attention from both the community and law enforcement agencies.

At our council in Manningham a recent community safety survey has highlighted the area's outstanding safety record, ranking as the fourth-safest locality in Victoria and the second-safest in the Melbourne metropolitan area. However, the survey also underscores the prevalent concerns with scams within the community, an issue I know police are actively addressing. In fact in my electorate office I have recently started to stock the *Little Black Book of Scams*, which, despite its name, is not a how-to guide to scam people but is rather a book of how to avoid scams that I encourage my constituents to pick up at my electorate office at their leisure. The commitment of our police force to addressing these concerns head-on is commendable. Through ongoing forums and community surveys they are actively working towards creating safer environments and addressing the specific challenges faced by our neighbourhoods. So may I say a big thankyou from me to our local police officers who make Warrandyte and our electorate safe and secure. We thank you very much.

This bill proposes adjustments to the Child Employment Act 2003, specifically concerning exemptions from a working with children check. Notably, police custody officers will no longer be obligated to undergo a working with children check when engaged in child-related work, aligning their conditions with those of police and protective services officers. This modification aims to streamline worker screening requirements, ensuring uniformity among crucial frontline roles within Victoria Police. Although rare, it is a welcome change of pace to see a government amendment that seeks to streamline government rather than to convolute it.

The proposed changes to the Firearms Act 1996 permit licensed firearms dealers to receive firearms from unlicensed individuals for sale, registration or destruction. Furthermore, special conditions for longarm licences are introduced, including restrictions on the use of detachable magazines exceeding five shots in combination with a bolt action shotgun. It is crucial to note that these changes respond to emerging concerns despite the absence of concrete evidence or events justifying these adjustments.

In the domain of countering violent extremism, amendments to the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 focus on refining the procedures and operations of the Countering Violent Extremism Multi-agency Panel.

In conclusion, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023 represents a comprehensive effort to enhance efficiency, integrity and safety within Victoria's legal framework. The proposed changes aim to address emerging issues, streamline processes and ensure the continued effectiveness of our law enforcement and judicial systems. Moving forward, it is imperative to engage in open and constructive dialogue to further refine these proposals and align them with the values and needs of our community.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:44): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. Can I start by thanking the Attorney-General for all of her work on this important bill. The safety of all Victorians is at the forefront of this bill, which will deliver a suite of reforms to ensure Victoria Police have what they need to keep our community

safe. I also want to acknowledge and thank Victoria Police and our PSOs for everything they do to keep our community safe. They are not just about catching the bad guys, they also support our community in many ways, and I see that in my electorate of Geelong. The police work alongside family violence organisations to provide the best possible support to those impacted, and they do an extraordinary job. I have seen the work that they do, and my community is very appreciative of the work they do and how they tie in with organisations like the Orange Door. They attend tragic accidents and incidents, and I can only imagine what it must be like for them. They do it regularly, knocking on people's doors to let loved ones know that there has been some sort of tragic accident where people have been seriously injured or in fact killed. I think they do an incredible job in that area.

During the summer months in the Geelong region obviously our population grows with tourism, and our police and first responders become very busy and have to deal with all sorts of circumstances that arise right throughout the Geelong area and our beautiful coast, so my hat goes off to them for the work that they do in not only managing large crowds but also keeping our community safe. Obviously police have great community engagement throughout our region. We often see them out and about. In fact only last week I was at a community event. We were sitting down having a meal at this event and there were a couple of young children sitting at the table while we were eating with two police officers. I was so impressed with the engagement that they had with those children, who had never really had any engagement with the police before – good or bad, thank goodness. The way that those police officers engaged with those children was incredible, and it was great to be able to sit there and listen to the conversation that was going on. That is a really important role of our police officers – to engage with our community, particularly children and young people. We have already heard in this place about the work that other members have seen their police officers doing throughout their electorates. Again, it is really important, that community engagement for our local police.

Of course one of the big ones is about keeping us safe on the roads. One life lost on our roads is way too many. It is our police officers that deliver that tragic news, as I said earlier, about death and injury. That is included in this bill, which is another really important piece. We need each driver to make the right choices, but for those who choose to do the wrong thing, we are providing the police with the tools and resources they need to hold those drivers accountable. Again, that is really important. I know in my electorate there have been many road blitzes going on, particularly around mobile phones. I have had conversations with the TAC and other stakeholders about what we need to do to address some of those serious issues. You know, there are way too many deaths on our roads at the moment. We are now relying on our police to utilise the resources that they have, and this bill actually extends those resources. This is really important work that they are doing.

The bill will introduce reforms to maintain community safety by increasing Victoria Police's capacity to regulate firearms. I know the member for Bentleigh raised that issue earlier about the importance of firearm safety. We see what happens in other countries, particularly America. There is not much that I can say I liked about John Howard, but introducing the gun laws was probably one of the most significant things that he did in his time as Prime Minister, and I have every respect for that decision. I think it is really important. We need to make sure that our community is safe when it comes to guns, and our gun laws are really, really important and cannot be reduced in any shape or form. This bill addresses those as well. It is about making administrative enhancements to the operation of the countering violent extremism multi-agency panel and expanding the circumstances in which police officers are authorised to use vehicle immobilisation devices.

The bill also includes a range of reforms aimed at strengthening the integrity of the Victorian police discipline system and to ensure that Victoria Police personnel operate in a way that is consistent with community expectations. I have just talked about how fantastic our police force is, but there are always those one or two that do not do the right thing. As a member of Parliament I have had constituents come to me with complaints about a particular member of the police force. We need as a community to be confident that when we raise these issues, they are dealt with in the most appropriate way. As I said, 99.9 per cent of our police officers are out there doing the right thing – they are looking after our

community, they are going after the bad guys, they are doing what we ask them to do and expect them to do – but every now and then there is an incident that should not happen. That can be a minor incident through to a fairly significant one, but we need to make sure there are processes in place to deal with them so that the community feel confident that they are being dealt with appropriately.

The bill will also enhance the privacy of participants of the restorative engagement and redress scheme for Victoria Police and make minor technical amendments to other Victorian legislation. It amends the Victoria Police Act 2013, Firearms Act 1996, Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958, Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003, Road Safety Act 1986, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 and Worker Screening Act 2020.

This bill will enhance Victoria Police's disciplinary system and support Victoria Police and other agencies to maintain community safety, with dangerous drivers to be targeted earlier and stronger safety controls placed on recreational firearms. As I mentioned earlier, the road safety issues are really prominent at the moment because of the increase in serious car accidents where we are seeing multiple deaths in one car accident. This is really concerning in my community, as I am sure it is right across the state. We need to ensure that our police have the resources and the power to do something about it to help deal with those people on the roads that should not be on the road that are doing the wrong thing. As I said earlier, many people do the right thing, but it only takes one person to be distracted, to do the wrong thing, to pick up their mobile or to be distracted by others in the vehicle to cause a major accident where people are killed or seriously injured or both, and we are seeing that happen on our roads at the moment.

As I mentioned, my community is really concerned about this. Many constituents have had conversations with me about how we begin to address this. I know the police and the TAC are working hard to address these issues to ensure that everyone is safe in our community and that when we get in our vehicle we can feel confident that everyone on the road is doing the right thing. This is a really important bill. It is a significant bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:54): I am pleased to rise to say a few words on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I would not mind a dollar for every time I have risen to speak on a justice legislation amendment bill; there have been a few of them in my time. I endorse the comments of the member for Geelong and those before her. The member for Warrandyte and the member for Mordialloc I think also talked about the importance of this chamber supporting our police, and I absolutely do. This legislation is largely about police and police matters, and I particularly acknowledge the work of the police as we head into the holiday season, because they are among those frontline workers who, while the rest of us are putting our feet up and getting a well-earned break at the end of the year, are often the ones who are still on duty – indeed called to duty when all leave cancelled arrangements are in place. I say that particularly to my own family members. In one family in my wider family group there are currently five members of them in the police force. They do a great job, and I certainly thank them for the work they do.

Likewise I would like to acknowledge the work of the police in my electorate of Gippsland South. I will come to that a bit more in a moment, the work they do and the support that they need from the government. I acknowledge that it is a very thin blue line and they do a lot of great work in Gippsland broadly, in our small rural communities and in our larger regional towns. While I am there, I will give a little shout-out to Dale McCahon, a former sergeant at Leongatha who has just recently retired after 41 years in the force – retired from the force, I might add, but not from making a contribution to his community, which he is going on to do at Leongatha Secondary College, as I understand it. Dale was a great source of information and certainly a great community man in his time at Leongatha as well. So I wish him and his family all the best, and as I said, I wish to acknowledge the work of all the police officers as we head into the summer period.

This legislation enacts some aspects of the police discipline system and the code of conduct, and I certainly do not oppose that. I believe this was requested by the force itself. It did remind me of my

time on the former IBAC committee two parliaments ago, when we looked at the issues of police discipline and police complaints given that, of the complaints made to police, only about 2 per cent ever end up with IBAC. I just want to mention it because there are still people now who will say that the system is broken and that police should not be investigating police. While I agree that should be the case for the most serious instances of police misconduct and corruption – absolutely that is a role for IBAC, and we on this side believe that IBAC should have both its powers and its resources strengthened to do more to root out corruption and misconduct in the police force – one of the things that we heard in the former IBAC committee as we collected evidence from around the state, around the country and indeed around the world was that police actually do need to investigate police on certain issues. At one extreme there is high-level corruption, at the other extreme there is the little old lady who says Constable So-and-so swore at me. Those sorts of things should not be going to an external body; they absolutely should be overseen by the superiors in the police station. Up to a level – and there is a fine line as to what that level should be – it is incumbent on police to manage their own in many respects, particularly on those more minor indiscretions. It is also incumbent that police have the understanding and the investigative powers and experience to actually investigate matters of corruption and matters of ill discipline and conduct by other police officers. Indeed many of the officers who work for IBAC uncovering the serious corruption will of course be former police officers. I just wanted to touch on that to ensure that we do not have an absolutist view of this situation.

I note there are a number of other aspects of this legislation, including changes to allow police to deploy vehicle-immobilising devices in a wider set of circumstances than is currently the case. Again that is something that I believe police have asked for, and I absolutely support that being used. Obviously there are difficult circumstances in which police would need to do that, given other traffic on the road, but it is certainly an issue that needs to be addressed. I know the issue of police pursuits is a vexed one, and a vexed one for the force and for governments all around the world, but I also know that there is frustration among serving and retired police officers at the current policies as they stand. Effectively, as soon as someone is being chased they know that if they put their foot down and make it a little bit dangerous, the police are going to back off. I think we probably need to look at how we better balance that, and perhaps this legislation, with the widened use of immobilising devices, is a good way of doing so.

There is another section in this bill with respect to firearms, and there are two aspects to it. One ensures that there is no issue with licensed firearm dealers accepting firearms that are being surrendered by people who may not have a licence as such. I guess it clarifies and gives some comfort to licensed firearm dealers. The second aspect of it relates to special conditions to be placed on the holders of category A or A and B long arm firearm licences, which includes my good self as a licensed firearm holder. I do not actually have any firearms, I quickly add, but I do have a licence so that I can, from time to time, borrow a rifle or a shotgun and bowl over a few of the rabbits that do appear around our place. But this special condition will state that a licensee cannot carry, possess or use a detachable magazine greater than five shots in combination with a bolt action shotgun unless it is for a purpose approved by the Chief Commissioner of Police. While I do not oppose that aspect of this legislation, I do hope that it has been sufficiently socialised with the law-abiding firearm community. It is sometimes a case of reform and regulatory creep when we talk about firearms regulation. I think this area is quite a narrow one, where I do not believe it will impact a lot of people. I note the second-reading speech indicates that this is proactive community safety reform, which is always good, but it also puts up a little flag for me, because I fear sometimes that the law-abiding firearm owners are the ones that can be impacted by this and it is actually the crooks that pay no attention to what we are doing in here and are breaking the law repeatedly. So I hope this does not have great impacts on our law-abiding firearm owners and hunters.

I might say too, with a couple of minutes to go and only an hour or so to go on the last day of sitting before we are back here in February, that I reiterate my support for duck season going ahead next year and for many years afterwards. This government needs to stand up to the radicals and make sure that it does not support the end of duck season. I think the new Premier has an opportunity to change the

tone of what the government has been doing over the past few years with respect to the Greens, the Animal Justice Party and various others in the other place, and it needs to actually hold the line and allow Victorian men, women, children and families to go about a business that they have been doing for many decades and which, as the inquiry heard, has minimal impact on actual duck numbers. The scientists made it very clear that habitat, habitat, habitat is the crucial thing.

I know Field and Game in Victoria and my own local branch, Sale Field and Game, in particular do a magnificent job in supporting habitat and growing habitat. The Heart Morass wetlands in particular, just out of Sale, is one of the areas where they do a lot of great work to support wild aquatic bird habitat. We do not have any issue with this legislation, with the one exception that I raised – that concern about firearms. We do need to support our police. They are a very thin blue line, particularly in South Gippsland. I have called on the minister to do more, and I look forward to seeing this bill pass.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (16:04): I am delighted to rise today to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023, another important piece of legislation that will introduce a range of reforms aimed at strengthening the integrity of the Victoria Police discipline system and to ensure that Victoria Police personnel operate in a way that is consistent with our community expectations. I commend the minister for bringing this bill forward, another justice-related amendment, of which we have seen many over the past sitting weeks – another bill aimed at improving the legislative framework to keep our community safe.

It was also fantastic to have the minister out to our area this month with a visit to Springvale police station. It is an amazing station, and I would like to thank Senior Sergeant Debra Lay as well as Inspector Peter Koger and Superintendent Damian Jackson for welcoming the minister as well as the member for Mordialloc and giving them a firsthand look at the important work that is happening at Springvale police station to keep our community safe. We are really lucky to have Springvale police station serving our community and we really do receive great service from the approximately 90 police personnel that make up the staff there. There are a host of challenges across the Clarinda electorate and the City of Greater Dandenong more broadly, and Springvale police station does an amazing job, so I would like to commend and thank them for their effort and dedication on that.

I am really proud to be part of a government that supports and invests in this important work. The government's record investments of \$4.5 billion are delivering 3637 new sworn police officers as well as a state-of-the-art intelligence system, new technology, new and upgraded police stations and stronger laws. We have benefited locally; since 2016, 225 additional police have been allocated to the Dandenong division, including 33 family violence specialist police, who are particularly welcome and important. Our record investment continues in the most recent budget with government announcements of another \$600 million funding boost, which includes \$342 million for an additional 502 police officers and 50 protective services officers, or PSOs. They have now all been recruited ahead of schedule this year and are due to be sworn in soon, which is fantastic. The recruitment of additional sworn members and PSOs will support Victoria Police to allocate more resources to areas of need and will help to further meet the growing needs of our state and build upon funding provided in 2016 and 2017. There is also some great work happening locally in crime prevention in conjunction with some of our local community organisations, which I would like to touch on a little bit later. But we have seen clearly this government's commitment to our police and community safety, and that continues here with this bill today.

As I mentioned, the bill will introduce a range of reforms aimed at strengthening the integrity of the Victoria Police discipline system and ensure that Victoria Police personnel operate in a way that is consistent with community expectations. This will be achieved through a host of amendments to the Victorian Police Act 2013, or VPA, including amendments to empower Victoria Police discipline inquiry officers to direct a police officer or protective services officer to undertake independent medical assessments if they are satisfied that the assessment is necessary to determine whether the officer is physically and mentally fit to participate in a disciplinary inquiry. Further, there are amendments to expressly provide that a breach of the Victoria Police code of conduct is a breach of

discipline, and there are amendments to the provision that relates to conditions that Victoria Police may attach to a good behaviour bond that applies to a police officer in a disciplinary context, including adding a non-exhaustive list of relevant conditions, including drug and alcohol testing for up to two years, confirming how non-compliance with the bond may be addressed. Lastly, there are also amendments to extend the statute of limitations for the offence of Victorian police personnel accessing, using or disclosing police information from 12 months to three years. So there are important changes to maintain and strengthen the integrity of the discipline system.

The bill also includes reforms to maintain community safety by increasing Victoria Police's capacity to regulate firearms through some important changes to the Firearms Act 1996. There are some administrative enhancements to the operation of the countering violent extremism multi-agency panel. On this point I have spoken previously on the findings of the Expert Panel on Terrorism and Violent Extremism Prevention and Response Powers and the importance of creating pathways for early countering of violent extremism intervention, which is really, really important, as is the work that is happening through the department and in the community.

More broadly, we are continuing to do some great work in the south-east on community harmony, enhancing social cohesion and promoting community harmony through our community groups and the many multicultural organisations in Clarinda and particularly across the City of Greater Dandenong.

We all know that isolation is a big factor in potential extremism and the consequences of that, and this makes the opportunity to share one's culture, beliefs and experience with others even more important. Through this opportunity we can develop a greater sense of trust and belonging among all Victorians, and in doing so we have also seen in Clarinda and across Victoria the minimising of social division, misunderstandings and isolation. Deputy Speaker, like your electorate, Clarinda is a great example of multicultural Victoria and I believe a success story of multicultural Victoria. I am proud to be part of a government that continues to celebrate our diversity and also the diversity in our force.

I would like to, with the remaining time, say that I am very proud to support this amendment here today and very proud to be part of the Allan Labor government, a government that continues to support and invest in our police and invest in crime prevention and other initiatives to improve community safety in our local community and across Victoria. On that note it is the festive season, so I wish everyone in my electorate, all the parliamentarians in this house and the other place and especially my electorate officers Peter, Joel, Nancy, Salazar, Declan and Angie for their dedication and service to our local community, and everyone, a festive and safe season ahead, and I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (16:13): I rise today to talk about the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. As everyone else has said as the clock ticks down to the end of our sitting year, it is great to be able to stand in the chamber and talk on these amendments, which I note we are not opposing today.

First, I would like to thank the member for Berwick for his lead on this. There are a broad-ranging lot of amendments that are going through here, and I will speak on a couple of those as I go through. But like everybody, I think, to a person that is in the chamber, first and foremost I would love to thank Victoria Police for the work that they do and in particular all the police members in my local area of the Latrobe Valley, who do a sterling job – and I will talk about them shortly. I know that we do rely on them at this time of year with everybody exiting over Christmas once school and everything finishes, heading away for holidays and family time. We are the ones that get to go away, and a lot of our police force are called on to protect us, sometimes from our own silly decisions – if we are travelling along the road and we are on our phones.

We love to see the presence of physical police cars and the police force out on the roads and also out on our streets. In the Latrobe Valley at the moment we are pushing hard and have just completed a petition for more PSOs and police officers in the Latrobe Valley. I do wish to thank the PSOs we see

here constantly walking around Parliament protecting us and making us feel safe, and I am hoping in the future that their presence on the streets of the Latrobe Valley – we do have them in Traralgon, but on the streets of Morwell and also Moe – will do the same, as our local residents feel a little bit safer seeing their presence on the street.

The purpose of the bill is to amend, as I work through it, the Child Employment Act 2003 in relation to exemptions from working with children checks and to amend the Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 to further provide for the allocation of certain property, rights, liberties and obligations of the Country Fire Authority to Fire Rescue Victoria. As we briefly touched on the fantastic work of our police officers, our CFA people are now coming on line, and we are hoping that they do have a quiet Christmas and new year with the fire season. We do wish them all well and hope that they are safe. Also to the FRV officers that are now in our rural towns that are looking after the community, we just wish them well and thank them for all their hard work.

Also the amendments go to amending: the Firearms Act 1996 in relation to the surrender of firearms to licensed firearm dealers and special conditions for long arm licences; the Road Safety Act 1986 to further provide for the use of vehicle immobilising devices; and the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 to further provide for the procedures and operations of the Countering Violent Extremism Multi-Agency Panel and for the powers of the courts and the secretary's delegates in relation to support and engagement orders. You can see we do have a wide-reaching lot of amendments that are coming through here that we are talking about today. It is great that we can actually talk about these important bills in the chamber. As the member for Gippsland South said, the amount of times that he has been able to stand up and talk about justice legislation amendments to make the community safer – it is part of our job to do that and debate it. Sometimes we are debating and opposing each other, but it is also fantastic when we can stand in the chamber and make sure the amendments can move through to do what we want to do, and that is to keep our community safe.

The bill amends the Victoria Police Act 2013 in relation to the code of conduct for members of Victoria Police personnel; medical assessments of fitness to participate in inquiries relating to an alleged breach of discipline; and conditions that may be imposed on a police officer or protective services officer for a breach of discipline or an offence punishable by imprisonment. As we said before, we all like to think our police are always doing the right thing, but as we have learned over the journey, sometimes that is not the case. We need to make sure that the proper procedures are in place so if anything untoward happens, the law can actually come down in the right and correct manner. Changing some of these laws makes that a little bit easier also. The bill also makes amendments to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 in relation to federal subject matter and to the Worker Screening Act 2020 in relation to, as I said before, exemptions from a working with children check, and it makes other minor and technical amendments to those acts.

As we work through here – as I said before, touching back on the police, they do an outstanding job in my electorate of Latrobe Valley, and I do have a great relationship with the hierarchy and also the police in the townships of Traralgon, Morwell, Moe and Churchill. Our Churchill community sometimes get a little bit upset with the amount of time that their wonderful police officers have to spend going out to help the local officers in Traralgon, Morwell and Moe, sometimes appearing to leave the Churchill police station undermanned. We are, with our petition, asking for more police officers to come to the Latrobe Valley to stock up the main towns, and then our wonderful police force that are in Churchill can stay in Churchill and actually look after it. It is not only having the police force doing their job – they are also embedded in our community. We only have to see them at sporting events – they are always there, walking around and making sure everyone is great. There are some elderly people that come through my office, who are always on for a chat. Just the presence of having our police officers on the streets makes the elder members of the community in the Latrobe Valley feel safe.

Like everywhere, we do have our issues at the moment with youth crime. We know that the police are doing all they can within the rules and regulations that they have to adhere to. At the moment we have also got an uptake in cars being stolen around the townships of Traralgon, Morwell and Moe.

Unfortunately, being a tradie, people are breaking into tradies' utes and stealing all of their tools. That is ramping up. I am not sure if this is the time of the year that that does happen, but there has been a marked uptake in cars being stolen around the community. I think that is pretty broad and general right across Victoria. We really want to make sure that our police officers are well and truly able to attend. With our regulations of having X amount of police and that they have got to have their rest, one of the things that is concerning us down there is that the time that the Moe police station will be open for people to attend is going from 24 hours down to 16 hours. We hope that that is only a short-term fix until we can get the new officers that are going through the police academy at the moment to come through, but that is a concern for residents of Moe. As I said before, we are not opposing the bill.

In my last 20 seconds, as other members have done, I would just like to wish everybody a safe and happy break as they go home and spend time with their families. Stay safe. It has been an education for me, the last 12 months, being a newbie in the Parliament. Thank you, everybody, and stay safe.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (16:23): I rise to contribute to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023, and I want to thank all of the previous contributors to this bill for their input. Firstly, I want to acknowledge our Victoria Police members right across the state for the fantastic work that they do in keeping us safe. It is hard work, and they do an amazing job. In particular, out in my area of Melton we have got a great police workforce out there, led by Lisa Prentice-Evans. I have had a lot to do with the local police out there, dealing with a lot of the community issues, and I cannot thank them enough. I hope it is a quiet Christmas period for them. It is not likely to be, but let us hope and keep our fingers crossed that it is. Also, here in the parliamentary precinct, there are the PSOs and the wonderful work they do in keeping us safe around the precinct – the PSOs right across the system, but in particular here, keeping us safe. That is fantastic, and again, I wish them all very well for the festive season.

This legislation had wide consultation prior to being put to the house. I should just rattle off the different stakeholders that were involved in the consultation process. Of course that was Victoria Police, TPAV – the Police Association Victoria – the Police Registration and Services Board, IBAC, the Victorian Firearms Consultative Committee, Fire Rescue Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, VCAT, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, Victoria Legal Aid and the Commission for Children and Young People. This bill is very important, and of course it was important to consult widely. Just rattling off those agencies there just goes to show what work was put in place to formulate this bill and to put it before the house.

This legislation is designed and targeted to bring in a new era of integrity, community alignment and safety within Victoria Police. We know that there have been some moments in past years in regard to some things that have happened within VicPol. They are obviously going through cultural change, and this bill will assist with that. It is a comprehensive bill that covers off a series of reforms detailed to fortify the very fabric of the discipline system, ensuring that the conduct of Victoria Police personnel is in line with the expectations that we have right across our community.

The bill also extends beyond discipline, reaching into the realm of community safety by bolstering Victoria Police's ability to regulate firearms. It contains administrative enhancements to the operation of the countering violent extremism multi-agency panel and is set to amplify our collective efforts in safeguarding our communities against evolving threats. We know that there are always some extremists out there that want to threaten our communities and individuals.

The bill broadens the circumstances under which police officers are authorised to employ vehicle immobilising devices, and that is a critical measure to keep the public safe. We have seen recent driving events where the police have had to use those road spikes, and this will just broaden the opportunity for them to use the road spikes.

A crucial aspect of this bill is its commitment to privacy, which is particularly clear in the provisions dedicated to elevating the privacy of participants in the Victoria Police restorative engagement and

redress scheme. It underscores our dedication to creating a system that not only addresses grievances but does so with the utmost respect for the individuals involved.

Of course there are technical alterations; the bill also incorporates minor technical amendments to various pieces of Victorian legislation, further refining the legal framework within which we run. As we delve deeper into the details of this transformative bill, let us collectively recognise its profound impact on the principles of justice, safety and community trust. Together we embark on a journey towards a more accountable, secure and harmonious Victoria, and that starts with our police force.

The legislation currently under consideration in the house brings forth a series of transformative measures in the realm of policing, with the overarching goal of fortifying the integrity of the Victoria Police discipline system and aiding both Victoria Police and allied agencies in upholding community safety. The proposed legislation introduces amendments to the Victoria Police Act 2013 with the primary aim of enhancing the discipline system. In 2022 there was a notable uptick in disciplinary hearings involving police officers and protective services officers facing charges related to breaches of discipline under the police act or criminal offences. Again, all industries have some people that do not toe the line, and we have got to admit that, but in VicPol they have had some incidents where some of their members have not complied with things that you would expect they would comply with and unfortunately have faced some disciplinary processes. This will strengthen and bolster up those processes to deal with them. As I say, the majority of VicPol officers exemplify their values and the standards expected by the rest of us in the community. Of course it is imperative that we establish a robust discipline system that keeps the members accountable and keeps and maintains an appropriate standard that the community would expect. So I am pleased that this bill will bolster that up. There is reference to the Victoria Police code of conduct, and that is to be used as a benchmark. We all know that in the past some people have breached that, so that is an important issue.

In cases of disciplinary inquiries a police officer or PSO has the choice to seek a postponement to those inquiries based on medical grounds. Of course they would be required to provide medical evidence of that to postpone any actions or investigation against them, and that would have to be dealt with by a qualified medical officer. The assessment at times will specifically evaluate their physical and mental health and whether they can proceed through the inquiry based on their health and welfare, and it will make sure that they are capable both from a mental point of view and a physical point of view of proceeding through the investigation process. There is also the introduction of good behaviour bonds in cases of disciplinary breaches and indeed for some criminal offences, and there is a situation where some additional conditions can be placed on the person under investigation, if there are findings against them, where there can be some additional things that the police force may wish to add to any outcome in regard to an investigation.

This bill is an important bill for the state to bolster up and improve, as I said earlier, the culture within VicPol, and as I say, it is only a minority of people within VicPol that have caused any problems and had any problems. I am pleased to say that the majority of our police officers are fantastic people that protect us right across the community. Again, as I say, just as a reminder, it is really about cultural change, and that is what it assists with to meet our community standards.

Just with the minute that I have got to go, again I am going to come back to the importance of police work and what they do and the pressures they are put under. Sometimes they become a target of some people within our community, which is totally inappropriate. I cannot understand why people would do that. I extend my thanks and support to all our VicPol members and our PSOs again. I want to take this opportunity to make sure that not only the police and the PSOs but everyone in this chamber and this Parliament and their families have a great festive season and hopefully have a nice break away with their family, come back nice and refreshed next year so we can get back into it and battle on again. I commend this bill to the house.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (16:33): I move:

That debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Business of the house

Adjournment

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (16:33): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until Tuesday 6 February 2024.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023

Council's amendments

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (16:34): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 6 insert –
 - “(ab) to amend the **Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012** in relation to the Australian Valuation Property Classification Code for certain land uses; and”.

NEW CLAUSE
2. Insert the following New Part to follow Part 2 –
 - ‘**Part 2A – Amendment of Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012**
 - 12A Amendment of Schedule**
 - (1) In item 3 of the Table in the Schedule to the **Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012**, for “615–623, 626–637,” **substitute** “615–620, 623, 628–637,”.
 - (2) In item 5 of the Table in the Schedule to the **Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012**, for “640–642,” **substitute** “621, 622, 626, 627, 640–642,”.
3. Clause 16, line 8, after “land” insert “for a sale price less than the threshold amount”.
4. Clause 16, line 16, after “land” insert “for a sale price less than the threshold amount”.
5. Clause 16, after line 24 insert –
 - “(3) In this section –
 - sale price*, in relation to a contract, means the price of the land that is specified in the contract, however expressed, less any discount or rebate that is specified in the contract, whether or not the discount or rebate is contingent;
 - threshold amount* has the meaning given in section 10I.”.
6. Clause 16, page 16, line 9, omit ‘1997.’ and insert “1997.”.

7. Clause 16, page 16, after line 9 insert –

‘10I CPI adjusted threshold amount

- (1) The *threshold amount* for a calendar year is to be determined in accordance with the following formula –
- (a) for a contract entered into on or after 1 January 2024 and on or before 31 December 2024, \$10 000 000;
- (b) for each subsequent calendar year, the amount determined in accordance with the following formula –

$$TA = \frac{(A \times B)}{C}$$

where –

TA is the threshold amount being determined for a calendar year;

A is the amount of the threshold amount for the previous calendar year, as rounded up or down in accordance with subsection (2);

B is the sum of –

- (a) the consumer price index number for the last reference period in the calendar year preceding the previous calendar year; and
- (b) the total of the consumer price index numbers for each of the reference periods (other than the last) in the previous calendar year;

C is the sum of –

- (a) the consumer price index number for the last reference period in the calendar year one year earlier than the calendar year referred to in paragraph (a) of B; and
- (b) the total of the consumer price index numbers for each of the reference periods (other than the last) in the calendar year one year earlier than the calendar year referred to in paragraph (b) of B.

Example

In the case of a determination of the threshold amount for 2025, “A” is the threshold amount for 2024, “B” is the sum of the consumer price index numbers for December 2023, March 2024, June 2024 and September 2024 and “C” is the sum of the consumer price index numbers for December 2022, March 2023, June 2023 and September 2023.

- (2) The threshold amount determined under subsection (1)(b) is to be rounded up or down to the nearest \$100 000 and, if the amount of the CPI to be adjusted is an exact multiple of \$50 000, is to be rounded up.
- (3) The Director of Consumer Affairs must publish the threshold amount for a calendar year on an appropriate website on or before 1 December in the calendar year preceding the relevant calendar year.
- (4) A failure to comply with subsection (3) in respect of a calendar year does not affect the operation of section 10G in respect of the threshold amount for that year.
- (5) In this section –

consumer price index means the all groups consumer price index weighted average of eight capital cities in original terms published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as at 15 November immediately preceding the date on which the Director of Consumer Affairs publishes the threshold amount under subsection (3).”.

NEW CLAUSE

8. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 16 –

‘16A New section 58 inserted

After section 57 of the *Sale of Land Act 1962* insert –

“58 Apportionment of amounts under contracts of sale of land

- (1) Section 10G does not apply to a contract of sale of land entered into before 1 January 2024.

- (2) Section 10H does not apply to any of the following –
- (a) a contract of sale of land entered into before 1 January 2024;
 - (b) an option to enter into a contract of sale of land granted before 1 January 2024;
 - (c) a contract of sale of land entered into on or after 1 January 2024 under the exercise of an option that was granted before 1 January 2024.”.

9. Clause 34, page 28, line 20, omit “tax.” and insert “tax.”.

10. Clause 34, page 28, after line 20 insert –

‘(4D) In making a determination under subsection (4B), the Commissioner must have regard to guidelines issued by the Treasurer under this section.

(4E) The Treasurer must issue guidelines for the exercise of the Commissioner’s discretion under subsection (4B) and cause those guidelines to be published in the Government Gazette.

(4F) Guidelines issued under subsection (4E) are not a legislative instrument within the meaning of the **Subordinate Legislation Act 1994**.”.

11. Long title, after “**Duties Act 2000**,” insert “the **Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012**,”.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (16:34): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to and the following amendments be made to the bill:

1. Insert the following New Clauses to follow Clause 27 –

‘27A What is the rate of land tax?

For section 35(3) of the **Land Tax Act 2005** substitute –

“(3) Subject to section 88EB, the rate of vacant residential land tax is –

- (a) if the land was not liable for vacant residential land tax in the preceding tax year – 1%; or
- (b) if the land was liable for vacant residential land tax in the preceding tax year but not the tax year preceding that tax year – 2%; or
- (c) if the land was liable for vacant residential land tax in the last 2 preceding tax years – 3%.

Note

For the purposes of the vacant residential land tax, the taxable value of the land is the capital improved value of the land as at the relevant date – see section 19(1A).”.

27B Holiday home exemption

For section 88A(1)(a) of the **Land Tax Act 2005** substitute –

“(a) in the year preceding the tax year –

- (i) the owner of the land or a vested beneficiary of a trust to which the land is subject used and occupied other land in Australia as a principal place of residence; and
- (ii) the owner of the land or a vested beneficiary of a trust to which the land is subject, or a relative of the owner or vested beneficiary, used and occupied the land as a holiday home for a period of at least 4 weeks (whether continuous or aggregate); and”.

2. Insert the following New Clause to follow Clause 28 –

‘28A New sections 88EA to 88EC inserted

After section 88E of the **Land Tax Act 2005** insert –

“88EA Land becomes residential land during third year preceding tax year and has not been used or occupied or changed ownership

- (1) Land is exempt from vacant residential land tax for a tax year if –
 - (a) at the commencement of the third year preceding the tax year the land was not residential land within the meaning of section 34B(1); and
 - (b) during the third year preceding the tax year the land becomes residential land within the meaning of section 34B(1); and

- (c) during the second year preceding the tax year the land is exempt from vacant residential land tax under section 88D; and
 - (d) during the year immediately preceding the tax year the land is exempt from vacant residential land tax under section 88E; and
 - (e) for the period from which the land becomes residential land within the meaning of section 34B(1) up to the tax year –
 - (i) the land has not been used or occupied; and
 - (ii) the land has not changed ownership; and
 - (f) the Commissioner is satisfied that during the period referred to in paragraph (e) the owner of the land made genuine attempts to sell the land at or below the price that they expected to receive when construction commenced on the land.
- (2) To obtain an exemption from vacant residential land tax under this section, the owner of the land must –
- (a) apply to the Commissioner for the exemption on or before 15 January of the tax year; and
 - (b) give the Commissioner any information the Commissioner requests for the purpose of enabling the Commissioner to determine whether the land is exempt from vacant residential land tax under this section.

88EB Residential land that has not been used or occupied or changed ownership for more than 3 years

- (1) Land is eligible for a concessional rate of vacant residential land tax of 1% for a tax year if –
- (a) in a preceding tax year, the land becomes residential land within the meaning of section 34B(1); and
 - (b) in a tax year after the tax year referred to in paragraph (a) but preceding the tax year, the land is exempt from land tax under section 88EA; and
 - (c) for the period from which the land becomes residential land within the meaning of section 34B(1) up to the tax year –
 - (i) the land has not been used or occupied; and
 - (ii) the land has not changed ownership.

88EC Publication of report on exemptions and concession

- (1) The Commissioner must publish on the Commissioner’s website an annual report of the following information for the 12 month period to which the report relates –
- (a) for each postcode in Victoria, the number of –
 - (i) exemptions granted under each of sections 88D, 88E and 88EA; and
 - (ii) concessions granted under section 88EB;
 - (b) the total amount of vacant residential land tax that was not payable because of the grant of the exemptions and the concessions referred to in paragraph (a).”.

3. Clause 30, line 15, omit “the commencement day, the land is” and insert “31 December 2023 the land was”.

4. Clause 30, line 27, omit “the commencement day, the land is” and insert “31 December 2023 the land was”.

5. Clause 30, line 33, omit “2023;” and insert ‘2023.’.

6. Clause 30, page 24, lines 1 to 3, omit all words and expressions on those lines.

7. Insert the following New Clause to follow Clause 34 –

34A What is the rate of land tax?

For section 35(3)(a), (b) and (c) of the **Land Tax Act 2005** substitute –

“(a) for residential land within the meaning of section 34B(2B) – 1%; or

(b) for any other land –

- (i) if the land was not liable for vacant residential land tax in the preceding tax year – 1%; or
- (ii) if the land was liable for vacant residential land tax in the preceding tax year but not the tax year preceding that tax year – 2%; or
- (iii) if the land was liable for vacant residential land tax in the last 2 preceding tax years – 3%.”.

For the benefit of the house I would like to provide a brief explanation of the proposed amendments. The vacant residential land tax – variable rate: this will make more properties available for people to live in. We are making changes to the vacant residential land tax (VRLT) rate so that dwellings that are vacant for multiple consecutive years pay a higher rate. Existing dwellings that are vacant for one year will still pay 1 per cent of capital improved value, those vacant for two consecutive years will pay 2 per cent and those vacant for three or more consecutive years will pay 3 per cent.

The vacant residential land tax – compliance: the government will establish a VRLT compliance trial in 2024 involving apartment towers and in 2025 involving inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne. The State Revenue Office (SRO) will use existing capabilities and compliance tools to identify properties that appear vacant and then seek further information from property owners to establish whether they are liable for the VRLT. The results of these trials will be provided by the State Revenue Office to the government in 2025 and subsequently published.

The vacant residential land tax – vacant land: the bill expands the vacant residential land tax to also apply to unimproved residential land that has been undeveloped for more than five years in established areas of Melbourne to discourage land banking and encourage new housing developments. We are making additional changes to allow the government to issue guidance and set out the factors that the commissioner of state revenue should take into account in determining whether there are legitimate reasons why vacant land has been vacant for more than five years and housing has not yet been built and therefore is not liable for the vacant residential land tax.

Vacant residential land tax – new dwellings: under existing vacant residential land tax exemptions, new dwellings that remain unsold can get an exemption from the VRLT for up to two years. To ensure that new residential developments are not discouraged, we are making changes so that owners of new dwellings can apply for a third exempt year from VRLT if it can be shown that the owner has made genuine attempts to sell at or below the price they expected to receive when they began construction. They must also apply for the exemption by 15 January the following year. If these properties remain unsold and vacant after that time, the VRLT will be calculated at a rate of 1 per cent until it is sold. To provide greater transparency, the government will publish figures each year on the number and value of properties receiving these exemptions.

The vacant residential land tax – holiday homes exemption: the exemption from VRLT for holiday homes used by owners for more than four weeks each year will be extended to include use by immediate family members. The government has also committed to extending the holiday homes exemption to include properties held in a trust or company as of 28 November 2023, when this change was made public.

Renewable energy: an amendment in the original bill would reinstate the long-held practice overturned in a 2021 court decision that fixtures should be included in calculation of a property’s capital improved value. This would have led to wind and solar farms and commercial battery storage facilities paying significantly more in fire services property levy than they do currently. We are making amendments so that wind and solar farms and commercial battery storage facilities pay the public benefit rate for the fire services property levy rather than the much higher industrial rate. In doing so our government is again demonstrating its commitment to a renewable energy future to encourage Victoria’s continued leadership in renewable energy. The government will also include commercial battery storage facilities in the payment in lieu of rates scheme that already applies to electricity generators, including wind and solar farms, with this change to be worked through in the first half of 2024.

Section 94 of the Electricity Industry Act 2000 allows electricity generators to seek to pay an amount in lieu of local council rates under the payment in lieu of rates scheme. The Electricity Industry Act does not account for battery storage technologies, which are relatively new and not strictly defined as generators. However, storage will play an increasingly important role in supporting renewable generation. So as to ensure consistency, we will include batteries in the pilot scheme.

Other amendments: the bill prohibits the apportionment of land tax as a consumer protection measure. After further consultation, we are moving an amendment to provide an exemption from this rule for property purchases of \$10 million and greater on the basis that purchases of property above this figure do not require this protection and that there may be specific reasons why additional flexibility in contracting is of benefit to both parties to such transactions. The start date for the banning of land tax apportionment has been clarified to be 1 January 2024. We are also amending the transitional provisions for uninhabitable properties and properties under construction in the expanded area to clarify that the transitional provisions only apply to lands that were under construction or uninhabitable as of 31 December 2023.

I might wrap up my contribution there. I do want to acknowledge the hard work of the Treasurer in relation to getting us this far. I want to thank him, I want to thank his office and I want to thank officials for all their work in getting this important piece of legislation back to the Parliament.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (16:40): I also rise to speak on the government amendments to the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023. At the outset, Deputy Speaker, may I indicate to you and to the house that the opposition supports some components and opposes others within the government amendments package. Therefore I ask that when the question is put the person in the chair at the time splits the question at the conclusion of debate.

I have a couple of points on the amendments before us today. Firstly, the timing of the amendments – I do not blame the Treasurer’s staff for this by any stretch; I know that they have been working night and day to get these amendments to the Parliament for us to consider here. But I do think it is highly unusual, perhaps unacceptable, for these amendments to be provided at such a late stage in the day. I want to remind the house of just how we have come to this point in time. This bill was announced by the Treasurer at a Property Council of Australia breakfast unbeknownst to the property council. The Treasurer was invited to address the media, who had legitimate questions about this particular bill, and squibbed that opportunity until very late in the day when he did address the media.

Now we are discovering how this government does business, as this government shares with the Victorian people just how it will increase new taxes 52 and 53. These two new taxes are taxes that the Victorian people simply cannot deal with at this time. We know that Victoria is the highest taxed state in the nation. We have known that for some time. Those are not my words; they are the words of the independent Parliamentary Budget Office, which this side of the chamber supports wholeheartedly. We know that we have a higher amount of debt than any other state in the nation. We know that we are paying a higher amount of interest per day than any other state in the nation, and we know that those interest repayments are subjected to Reserve Bank of Australia decisions. But equally those interest payments mean that the state of Victoria cannot spend and invest the money at this time on the infrastructure that our community needs and the services that our community needs. If I look around the chamber and around the state, all I see, frankly, are the needs of our fellow Victorians.

Specifically on the amendments before the chamber that we are considering at the moment that the Assistant Treasurer introduced – he is no longer here, but hopefully he will keep us company in the not too distant future – I think they are a little bit untidy, and this has only been brought to my attention in recent moments. The way that they are drafted means that I will need to move a couple of amendments to the amendments before the chamber at the moment in order to articulate the opposition’s position on the amendments before us. I draw the house’s attention to amendment 1, 27A, which increases the land tax amount from 1 per cent on a vacant residential body to 3 per cent over successive years and 3 per cent consistently thereafter. Still on clause 1 of that amendment, 27B, the

holiday home exemption is, as I have indicated to the Treasurer's office, something that we do support. Clunky as it may be, because the government's drafted amendments include a clause that we oppose and a clause that we support all within the same amendment, I move:

That the words 'New Clauses to follow Clause 27' be omitted and replaced with 'New Clause to follow Clause 27' from further amendment 1.

I am doing this for a very sensible reason, and that is that on this side of the house we do not believe that Victoria should be imposed with new taxes. We do not believe that without a plan to pay off our debt – and again, do not ask me, ask the Auditor-General, who released his report last Friday – there should be no new taxes introduced in this state. This bill introduces a new vacant residential land tax, it introduces an expanded land tax and it introduces a tax on unimproved land. For as long as this government does not have a plan to pay down the debt – not my words, but what was intimated in the Auditor-General's report of last Friday – and for as long as this government continues to waste at the rapid rate at which it does – every major project they have touched is either over budget or over time, that is their record over the last nine years – for as long as they do not have a plan to address waste, no new taxes should be introduced. Just as households, just as businesses right around this state are required to do, we should, as a state, be able to live within our means. I am sorry to say that under the leadership of this government that is simply not possible.

In relation to the holiday home exemption, we believe that this is a sensible amendment. In fact we will be supporting this amendment. We will be supporting this amendment because it expands the requirement for occupancy of a holiday home from simply the owner of that property to the owner's family as well. We think that is an entirely sensible amendment, and therefore we will be supporting that, which is why I have moved the amendment that I have.

I have further bad news for the house – and again this is the state of things, and I am frankly sorry that it is the state of things – but I also need to move a second amendment in relation to amendment 2 proposed by the government to simply separate out two of the new sections, 88EA and 88EB. I am doing that because in amendment 2 proposed by the government we do not agree with new section 88EA, we do not agree with 88EB but we do agree with 88EC. Therefore I further move:

That the words 'New sections 88EA to 88EC inserted' be omitted and replaced with 'New section 88EC inserted' from further amendment 2.

The reason why I have moved this motion, untidy as it may be on the last sitting day of this parliamentary year, is because we disagree with 88EA, we disagree with 88EB but we support 88EC. 88EC addresses the publication of the report on exemption and concession. Frankly, any opportunity for there to be reporting on public matters when it comes to public cash – that transparency is something that we do support. Further, I indicate that we intend to support amendments 3, 4, 5 and 6 but oppose, in whole, amendment 7. Again, amendment 7 introduces or increases tax on vacant residential land from 1 per cent to 3 per cent over successive years.

I will not speak for much longer other than to say this: we would not be in this situation, considering on the last sitting day of this year a tax bill that imposes an unnecessary burden, in my view, on our fellow Victorians, if it was not for the dirty deal that was done between the government and the Greens to get this through. Frankly, the dirty deal that was done between the Greens party and the Allan Labor government to get this through – no Victorian should be surprised that it took this dirty deal to be done for new taxes 25 days before Christmas to be imposed upon Victorians, but that is the matter that we are considering here. I know that at this point in our history, at this point in our calendar, moments before Christmas, there are families right around this state who are struggling. There are families right around this state who are struggling to make ends meet and who want to do the very best that they can for their family, for their children, for their neighbours within their community. That is what they want to do: they want to celebrate a happy Christmas, perhaps even a holy Christmas. But because of taxes imposed on them by this government, some 53 new or increased taxes over the last nine years, their

aspiration to live their best lives, their aspiration to have the very best Christmas that they can, is going to be that much harder.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, the member is using this opportunity to stray far and wide, and I would ask that you bring him back to speak to the amendments to the amended bill that he is seeking to prosecute.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Sandringham to continue on the amendments.

Brad ROWSWELL: Indeed I will, because there are new taxes introduced in this bill.

Members interjecting.

Brad ROWSWELL: There are – there are new taxes introduced in this bill. Someone has got to pay for those new taxes. It probably will not be the minister at the table, but it might be someone else who can least afford it. And that is the point: weeks before Christmas, at a time when families are trying to make ends meet and put food on the table during a cost-of-living crisis, it is on the heads of government ministers and government members over the last nine years who have presided over 53 new or increased taxes that are making life that much harder for Victorians, and that is something that this government should hold its head in absolute shame over.

I encourage the chamber to consider the amendments that I have moved. I say to the government – and I believe that the Treasurer's office will concur with this point – that what I have tried to do, leading this matter on behalf the coalition, is work constructively with the government when the opportunity has been presented. It would be helpful if the government would agree to the amendments that I have moved during the course of this contribution, which would provide a much cleaner and clearer way of indicating where the government sits on matters which it believes to be true and where the opposition sits on matters as well. I am just sorry to say that that was not considered when these amendments were presented to the house moments ago. I look forward to making a further contribution when the time permits.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:53): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023, and from the outset it has become wholly apparent that those opposite are on one hand talking about people who will be battling around Christmas – people who might have trouble paying the bills, people who are feeling a cost-of-living crisis, people who are feeling every Reserve Bank of Australia interest rate rise – but they are not actually connected to them. Instead of talking about people who do not have a roof over their head, they are talking about people who might own 17 homes, like some of their members.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is entirely irrelevant for the member to be reflecting on the members of his frontbench, like the member for Mill Park and her home ownership.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is there a point of order, member for Brighton?

James Newbury: Relevance, Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Relevance, thank you.

James Newbury: The member should not be attacking his own frontbench, like the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and the Minister for Energy and Resources.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Points of order are not an opportunity for debate. The member for Frankston to come back to the amendments, please.

Paul EDBROOKE: Merry Christmas – the member for Brighton decided to give us his opinion for Christmas. It is not a present we want.

What I am concerned about and what I think people on this side of the house are concerned about is housing, people who can no longer afford their bills, people who need help via a government that is willing to make bold decisions and act so that they can keep their family in the same house, so they can keep a roof over their head. That is something that is very, very important to me. I would like to know from those opposite who they consulted with on these amendments, because it does not seem to me like there has been much consultation. On this side of the house there has been plenty.

We have heard a little bit about the vacant residential land tax and the variable rate, but this is basically to make more properties available for people to live in. There is an abhorrent amount of vacant properties in the CBD and other places in Victoria, and we have a housing crisis. As consistent with the Andrews and Allan Labor state government's housing statement, we are committed to making sure that everyone can get a roof over their head, and this is part of that. Yes, you have to be bold, yes, you have to be brave, and that is what sitting on this side of the chamber is all about. Existing dwellings that are vacant for one year will still pay that 1 per cent of capital improved value, those vacant for two consecutive years will pay 2 per cent and now those vacant for three or more consecutive years will pay a flat rate of 3 per cent. Again, I think this is a reasonable way to ensure that people can get a roof over their head. I only need to walk down Bourke Street, Collins Street, Lonsdale, Exhibition, whatever – there are people out there who rely upon governments like ours to make sure that they have a roof over their head, and it is bills like this and the amendments that have been presented to this house that are going to get that done.

The bill also expands on the vacant residential land tax to apply to unimproved residential land that has been undeveloped for more than five years in established areas of Melbourne. That is to discourage land banking and to encourage new housing developments. I think we have all seen in our LGAs and our cities land banking. As well as houses not being built and new estates not being built, we also have people land banking and just empty shops sitting there. It is a blight on some of our shopping strips and our communities, and we have to do something about that. Again, it is one thing to be on the other side – all care, no responsibility – talking about housing and talking about people who cannot rub two cents together this Christmas. Think about the people who have not got a roof over their heads. I know my staff and I this Christmas will be spending quite some hours making hampers for people that cannot even eat over the Christmas period. It is governments like the Allan Labor government that are at the pointy end of the spear with this kind of legislation to make sure we are improving that. The first thing that people need – the thing that is part of people's ego – is actually having a roof over their head, and many people, once they have got that, find their life can get back on track rather quickly.

I could speak for 10, 20 minutes on this, and I could get very, very angry at some of the things I have heard, but I know that there will be a division on this and I am pretty confident that this will pass. I will allow some time for members of the opposition to speak on this. Hopefully there will be some facts. I am not sure I want to hear the Greens speak on this, though, if that is all right, but Sam is here. He is a known MP, and we do love hearing from Sam. I fully endorse the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023 and wish it a speedy passage.

Sam HIBBINS (Prahran) (16:58): Can I just say from the outset that the level of hardship, the level of housing insecurity, the level of difficulty that people are facing out there in the Victorian community when it comes to affordable housing, the idea or the fact that there are thousands of homes sitting empty in our community is just abhorrent. That is why we will be supporting these amendments that we worked constructively with the government to bring forward to this place. It is the scale of the housing crisis that really led the Greens' approach to this legislation, and when this legislation was first introduced, we flagged our concerns about it not meeting the needs of the Victorian people and not meeting the scale of the crisis that we are facing. We flagged a number of improvements that we wanted to see, both in this bill and broadly across government, in terms of what our priorities are for housing in terms of affordability for renters and –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The member will have the call the next time the motion is before the house.

Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023

Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I move:

That the sitting be continued.

Motion agreed to.

State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023*Council's amendments***Debate resumed.**

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (17:01): As I was saying, it was the scale of the issue that really drove the Greens response to this. In addition to the broader issues that we brought to the table, specifically in regard to this legislation, are concerns that even though the legislation expanded the vacant residential land tax – this tax on vacant homes – to across Victoria, the issues remained with its effectiveness. We raised two issues in regard to improving its effectiveness. Number one was the rate of the vacant residential land tax, and number two was the enforcement of that tax. We were largely concerned that this tax was not being effective in what its purpose is. The purpose of this tax is not to collect revenue but actually to push empty homes onto the market for renters and for people who are in need of their first home. The key amendments that are being brought before the house now are to increase that rate to 2 per cent if your home is vacant in the second year and then 3 per cent if it is vacant in that third year or subsequent years. My understanding is that this will cover a significant number of empty homes and will go a long way to pushing those homes onto the market. Secondly, enforcement – we will be seeing a pilot by the State Revenue Office (SRO) to look at every dwelling. That will really go a long way to ensuring that with the current system, which is the opt-in system, people simply are not avoiding or simply not paying this tax.

Another issue that was raised with us with this legislation was the significant increase in the fire services levy for renewable energy and storage projects. What we were told by the industry is that this would essentially put the brake on investment in renewable energy and storage in Victoria. So we were pleased to be able to work with the government so that rate would be lowered. Those projects would now be covered by a public benefit.

There are a number of other amendments within this bill that we will be supporting. We will not be supporting the opposition's amendments. I want to put on the record my thanks to the Treasurer, to his staff and to the SRO for working constructively with the Greens, working constructively to address the housing crisis and working constructively to address investment in renewable energies. The Greens were elected on a platform at this election to make housing more affordable and to increase support for renewable energy and on climate change. As I said, we looked forward. We were elected on a platform of pushing for more affordable housing and for more investment in renewable energy, and in our constructive negotiations with the government we now have a bill that the Greens are prepared to support where previously we were not. So we will be supporting these amendments, and we look forward to further constructive negotiations with the government to address the housing crisis.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (17:05): I rise to make a brief contribution on the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023 amendments. I have always been a supporter of the vacant residential land tax because this government is a government that wants to boost housing supply. We have a comprehensive housing statement, and these taxation measures are part of a suite of measures to boost housing supply. And do you know what – the Treasurer has said in the past that we as a government hope we do not generate any revenue from these new tax measures. They are not about generating revenue, they are about releasing these vacant properties and this vacant land into the economy so that people can have a roof over their heads, because those on this side of the house understand Victorians who are struggling. We understand Victorians who are struggling with the housing crisis. The member for Sandringham was talking about struggling families and the tax burden on struggling families of this vacant residential land tax. I do not know any struggling families who own vacant residential properties. That was just an unbelievable argument.

These are sensible measures, and I have got to say that these changes are very measured and balanced. They also recognise that there are extenuating circumstances as to why in some cases there might be vacant residential land. Under existing vacant residential land tax exemptions new dwellings that remain unsold can get an exemption from the VRLT for up to two years, and to ensure that new

residential developments are not discouraged, we are making changes so that owners of new dwellings can apply for a third year exempt from VRLT if it can be shown that the owner has made genuine attempts to sell at or below the price they expected to receive when they began construction. These are measured and balanced changes, and I have got to say the member for Sandringham moving amendments after this has already been debated in this house, debated in the other place, where amendments have been made, coming back here at 10 past 5 to move his own amendments – I mean, this matter is now settled. We are going to win this vote. That is all there is to it.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (17:08): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023 amendments immediately. These amendments and this bill are based on a con, because what the government is saying is ‘We have a plan to increase housing and we will increase housing by 80,000 homes each and every year’. From the first quarter of reporting post that promise the government will fail to meet their promise, and they will fail to meet their promise every quarter of the first year and every quarter for the 10 years after that. They will never meet that promise. It is a con. Forty times they will fail to meet that promise. What the government has said to people who are concerned about housing, to all Victorians who are concerned about housing, is if you let us tax you more, we will build more homes. That is the government’s plan. That is what they are saying to the community: just let us tax you more and we will build more homes. It is a con, and it will fail at each and every hurdle because we have not reached that level of development – we have never reached it – and to see this government prey upon Victorians who are concerned about housing and the shortage of housing in the most craven way is outrageous. We know that part of the money raised is just going to be going to fund the minister for European travel’s next trip – the Treasurer.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business knows that the debate is not an opportunity to impugn members on this side of the house, and he should refer to members by their correct titles. I ask you to bring him back to speaking directly on the amendments.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do apologise – the treasurer for European junkets.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Brighton! I can rule on the point of order, Leader of the House. The member for Brighton is well aware about using correct titles and is pushing his luck.

James NEWBURY: The concerns in relation to these amendments are not just concerns that have been raised by the coalition. The concerns around what is being proposed in these amendments have been raised by industry and by experts in industry. To refer to the property council’s most recent analysis of the amendments, they said:

... we do not consider the passage of this Bill to be a positive development for the property industry in Victoria ...

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: I will not take up the impugning interjections from the government. Further:

Victoria already has the heaviest property tax burden of any state in the nation. The reality is that this is creating an economic environment where Victorian businesses are struggling to attract capital investment to our state – jeopardising the capacity for our industry to build more homes.

I repeat: ‘jeopardising the capacity for our industry to build more homes’. The experts are saying exactly the point that I raised earlier. We know that the government’s commitment to build 80,000 more homes each year over the next 10 years will fail. We also know the government has been exposed as raising taxes purely as a revenue-raising measure but using the property and housing crisis as an excuse to introduce those taxes.

On the principle of the matter, as a Liberal these taxes go against the very property rights that we should all fundamentally believe in. I know that previous Labor speakers have spoken with glee at

introducing vacant property taxes, because the Labor Party does not fundamentally believe that you have the right to your own property. They want the government dipping into your pocket. That is a fundamental difference of principle between our parties. These new taxes go to a fundamental principle and to differences in our philosophical positions. These amendments are a con. They will not deliver the outcome of the promised housing increase. In fact at every step the government will fail – every quarter, every measurement – to reach their housing target.

But the second point – and the final point that I will make on these amendments – is what it should show Victorians: that Labor, like Julia Gillard, were willing to sell their soul to the Greens.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, on relevance, Deputy Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business is using this debate to insult a former Prime Minister, and I ask that you bring him back to speaking directly to the amendments in the bill.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, these amendments have passed due to an agreement between the government and the Greens. It is entirely relevant to note –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I can rule on the point of order. It is a matter for debate.

James NEWBURY: Hear, hear, Deputy Speaker. Today is the day that all Victorians should mark as the day they know that the Labor Party, like Julia Gillard, has sold their soul to the Greens. It is outrageous. It is absolutely outrageous. We know it. All Victorians have now seen it. What is the difference between this government and the former Gillard government? I remember watching the former Prime Minister clapping, shaking hands with Bob Brown as she did a dirty deal with the Greens, and that is what we are seeing today in this chamber – a deal between the Greens and Labor. What it means for all Victorians is that the government, when it comes to future pieces of legislation – they will do deals on future pieces of legislation. The taxes that are punitive, that will hurt all Victorians will always be worse now that this deal has been done between Labor and the Greens – on every policy from now on.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Kew can leave the chamber for 10 minutes.

Member for Kew withdrew from chamber.

Brad Battin interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: And the member for Berwick can leave –

Brad Battin interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Berwick can leave for an hour. I will be referring that to the Speaker.

Member for Berwick withdrew from chamber.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am still on my feet, for God's sake! Settle down.

James NEWBURY: People in this chamber should reflect when they introduce policy under the guise of doing something to help people who genuinely need it and promise to do things that they will never once achieve – in fact the person who promised it disappeared immediately after making the promise, and it is a craven, craven promise that is going to hurt people. These taxes are going to hurt people, but every Victorian should know that all future policies will be worse because the government will continue to do deals after selling their soul to the Greens in a way that no Victorian has seen since Julia Gillard.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would ask that you take the opportunity to review footage of the member for Berwick's behaviour as he left the chamber. He reflected on you and your ruling in a way that I think sought to bring disrepute to you, and his behaviour was completely out of order and unacceptable. I ask that you look at that footage and report back to the chamber on his behaviour and whether or not it warrants further investigation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will refer the matter to the Speaker.

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (17:19): I rise this afternoon to make my contribution on the amendments that have come back from the other place, and I do so by very clearly stating that the Allan Labor government recognises that in Victoria we have a housing crisis. Indeed right throughout this country and in many Western democracies right now people are finding it exceptionally difficult to get a roof over their head. That is a reality. The Labor Party of course will always strive to give every single Victorian that we can a roof over their head. We recognise that Victorians have a right to decent, secure and safe housing, and the housing statement and every action of this government are about bringing additional supply to the market because we recognise the dignity that comes from having safe and secure housing. That is why we have a comprehensive plan. That is why the housing statement went to bringing additional supply to the market, making sure that Victorians have that opportunity.

The reality in this state is that, unfortunately, properties that should be available to Victorians to see a decent roof over their heads are not available to them. What we have seen today, what we have seen over the course of this term of this government and what we have constantly seen is the Liberal Party running a protection racket for property developers. At every single opportunity when this government has brought legislation to this place that goes to increasing supply of property for Victorians, we see the Liberal Party time and time again getting in the way of that supply. From my end, we brought a bill to this chamber. We brought a plan to this chamber, and through goodwill and good discussion in the Legislative Council and through the hard work of Tim Pallas and others in that place an arrangement was struck that is fair and reasonable and that will bring additional supply to the market. What we have seen today in this chamber is the Liberal Party again running a protection racket for property developers. When we look at them, they are sitting there stonily silent because they are embarrassed by their efforts to protect those property developers. The reality is Victorians are entitled to a place. They are entitled to have secure housing. They are entitled to see the Victorian Parliament take the necessary steps to secure additional supply for Victorians.

I do not always like the Greens, but in this instance they came to this chamber and negotiated in good faith, unlike the Liberal Party, who are here to run –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member's time in the Gillard government watching that dirty deal is not relevant to the current debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Frivolous points of order will annoy me even more than I am already annoyed.

Darren CHEESEMAN: We have a comprehensive plan. That plan goes to bringing additional supply to the market. The Allan Labor government at every single step will take the opportunity to bring supply to the market, and these small tax measures are about encouraging supply to the market. It is the right thing to do by Victorians that this government and this Parliament take every single step that we can to do that. What we are seeing today in this chamber, what we are seeing by that poor behaviour over there from this lot during this debate, is them running a protection racket for property barons and property developers. This is about doing the right thing.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, the member should not be attacking the Premier for her support of the property industry yesterday.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member to continue on the amendments before the house.

Darren CHEESEMAN: These amendments are sensible amendments. We have seen poor behaviour in this debate this afternoon, as they have in their embarrassed way gone about trying to defend the interests of property developers. We will always strive at every opportunity to bring supply to the market. And why do we do that? Because we recognise that a lot of Victorians are doing it tough at the moment. We recognise that bringing additional supply to the market will drive down rents in this state. We recognise that bringing additional supply to the market through these measures and the other actions that this government is taking is about securing, for Victorians, housing supply. That is why I commend the hard work of this government in delivering the housing plan for Victorians. We will partner with anyone – any political party, any industry group – in bringing additional supply to this market. The reality is, as we have seen this afternoon, that the Liberal Party is again defending the interests of property developers and the wealthy. That is the reality.

It is the right thing to pass these amendments. It is the right thing to have a strong, comprehensive housing plan, as we do, and that is why I commend the hard work of the Allan Labor government and those that are willing to partner with us on this journey of delivering the housing statement, delivering housing supply to Victorians. It is a right to have decent, secure housing in this state. That is something that only a Labor government will ever deliver, because we see those opposite time and time again defending the interests of property developers against Victorians. I commend these amendments to this chamber – I am looking forward to them passing this afternoon, as they will – and I am disappointed but not surprised that we see the Liberal Party again defending the interests of property barons in this state.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (17:27): I want to start with a statement, and I challenge any of those opposite to discredit it: taxing property does not create any more of it – not a single property. We heard the previous Premier – and I very, very rarely ever agreed with the previous Premier – make the point that getting housing affordability and availability for both private and public renters is all about supply, supply, supply, and taxing property does not create any more of it.

I want to take up the commentary of the member for South Barwon attacking the Liberals – only the Liberals, apparently – for being the friends of the property developer. I am a little bit confused because today the government has done a deal with the Greens; only yesterday in answer to a question from the Greens the Premier sat right there and said, 'It's property developers that actually create property, that create homes'. And now they are standing there saying somehow that property developers are evil because they have done a deal with the Greens today. So I am very confused about where the Labor Party stands: is it with the Greens, or is it against them? Is it with the property developers who create homes for Victorians, or is it against them? It is very, very confusing, what they are saying.

There is always a very fine line, when you are in opposition, between opposing bad policy and bad legislation and trying to improve bad policy and bad legislation, and the member for Sandringham I think has struck a good balance with our position on these new amendments. We will support the things that actually will help reduce the burden on property owners, and we will oppose those that simply create more taxes, because taxing property does not create more property. The Leader of the House was standing there yelling at us before: 'We're trying to make housing available'. You do not make housing available when you introduce more taxes on it. These taxes being introduced by these amendments today, including the increase from 1 per cent to 2 to 3 per cent of capital improved value, will include the 53rd new or increased tax under this government, and 25 of those are taxes on property. The government seems to somehow think that taxing property is actually going to increase housing availability and affordability. Well, I would like any of them over there to go and do an economics course and understand the reality of supply and demand, particularly as it applies to taxation.

Members opposite have also said that this is only about property developers. Tell that to the couple from Rosedale that contacted me after the budget this year, one of whom is relying on her superannuation and one of whom who has one day of work a week because he lost his job during the pandemic. They have an inherited house on the beach, they do not have a couple of coins to rub together and yet they are now going to be subject to these taxes. Yet the member for South Barwon

seems to think that it is simply all about property barons, and I think that you will find there are plenty of Victorians who for various reasons have a second property who are not wealthy, not even remotely wealthy. I am sure the member for South Barwon will be hearing from those in his electorate as well.

I would like just to talk about again the government's failures on property. The Leader of the Opposition asked this week about Maddy Baker from my electorate in Sale, who has been on the waiting list for three years for public housing. The member for Polwarth raised a question today about Abbas, who has been on the list for 16 years, and I remind those members opposite of the failure so far on public and social housing. In the Gippsland region there are less houses in public and community housing now than there were in 2015 – less houses. Despite the Big Housing Build, there is less public and community housing in Gippsland now than there was in 2015, so this government has failed. It has introduced a windfall gains tax, it has introduced a COVID debt levy and now it is topping up with these additional taxes, which are only going to make the situation worse.

I would add to those that are saying we need to tax the property developers, did the government ever consider, if it wants to get vacant properties back on the market, perhaps an incentive rather than punitive measures? Did it ever consider maybe there was a way that we could say 'Hey, you've had that house unlive in for a period of time, maybe if you put it back on the market, we will give you a rebate on your land tax'? Did the government ever think of something like that? No. The Treasurer just sat there and thought 'No, I can actually kill two birds with one stone. I can put out a press release that says we're getting more housing back into the market, and I can rake in a few more dollars cash to try and fix the budget deficit and the debts that this government has got.'

I have not been able to catch the details because of the noise in this place about the deal that has been done with respect to renewable energy, but it sounds like, from what the member for Prahran has said, it is simply another subsidy for the renewable energy sector, so another deal between Labor and the Greens. These amendments are taxing property again: 25 property taxes out of 53 new or increased taxes under this government. I say again, supply is the answer, and taxing property never created any more property.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (17:33): I also rise to speak on the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023 new amendments, and I want to thank the Treasurer and his office for working these amendments through. They are important amendments. I would just like to start where the member for Gippsland South finished off. He talked about the supply of housing, and the supply of housing is critical: the supply of social housing, the supply of community housing and the supply of private housing. As I referenced when I was speaking on the initial bill, this bill is going to be really important in areas such as Box Hill, where we have a number of parcels of large vacant landholdings where the property owner has sat on that land for many, many years and it remains undeveloped. There needs to be a system in which these parcels of land are actually brought to market. With all respect to the member for Gippsland South, I do not see that offering them a payment to actually get that happening is going to generate that level of demand. If those developers do not want to bring it to market and they do not want to pay the tax, they can sell it off and provide it to another developer or another property owner who does have the capacity and does have the willingness to bring that to market.

When I look at and hear the responses of my constituents, that is what they want. Even today I received an email about a particular vacant property in the Box Hill electorate, asking what the government is going to do about bringing this site on and getting some development. They see that we have a housing crisis, and they want the government to do something about it. They went to council, and council said, 'It's not our problem.' It is an issue that the state is taking very seriously, and I am very glad that we have a bill in place and now amendments in place that will help facilitate these outcomes.

The other key element to the bill is the vacant residential land tax. I am glad to say that the amendments that have been agreed to are an escalation of rates based on the time or the duration of the level of vacancy. I think that that is an appropriate response to encourage and incentivise the use of vacant land. Having a house that is vacant for an entire year or an entire two years or an entire three years means

one less dwelling that is available to the rental market or available for sale for use by a family. It is really important that we make this stock available to our community. We are not going to just build the supply of homes by building new dwellings; we need to make use of the dwellings that we have.

I did actually reference in my initial speech on this bill the importance of having the State Revenue Office get involved in this process. I am pleased to see that as part of the amendments agreed to there will be a compliance trial established in 2024 focusing first on the apartment towers and then in 2025 going into suburban areas such as Box Hill, so that the State Revenue Office uses existing capabilities and compliance to identify the relevant property owners – to make sure if we do have a tax that applies that it is applied fairly and equitably, and that those that are required to pay it do in fact pay it. I commend the amendments and the bill to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (17:38): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023. Further to the member for Gippsland South's contribution, property taxes do not increase the supply of housing. Never has a property tax increased the supply of housing, and Victoria already has the greatest burden of property taxes anywhere in the country. The amendments today seek to actually increase property taxes, from 1 per cent to 3 per cent, and put a tax on unimproved land – the 52nd and 53rd taxes when it comes to Labor's new or increased taxes over the past nine years.

We are in the midst of a housing crisis in Victoria, and the Labor government's answer to that is to put more and more property taxes in place, which will do nothing to increase the supply of housing. The Labor government talks a big game: 80,000 new homes each and every year, totalling 800,000 new homes. That is more than 220 homes a day to be delivered under that target. To date the best Victoria has been able to do is 56,000 new homes, and that was at a time when our building and construction industry was not under the immense pressure it is now, so how these new homes will actually be delivered is not clear. But the answer to that of course from the Labor government is to put in place new property taxes. What we have here today is a dodgy deal with the Greens to increase property taxes on Victorians at a time Victorians can least afford it. We saw in fact in the house yesterday the Greens posing a question to the Premier. The Greens asked why the government would not call out the poor behaviour from the property industry.

We have heard from the property industry over recent months about their dealings with this government. They initially signed a partnership, when it came to the government's grand housing statement, that would look to deliver these new homes. Then, less than two weeks later, they were blindsided when the Treasurer decided to stand up at a Property Council of Australia breakfast and announce these new taxes without any consultation with the property industry. They were absolutely blindsided after, in good faith, signing a partnership with the government just two weeks earlier. At that time the property industry put out a notice that said to the other governments in Australia 'Don't do a Victoria' when it comes to property taxes and actually trying to increase the supply of housing. Then we have seen today that the property industry has put out another note, which says:

Victoria already has the heaviest property tax burden of any state in the nation. The reality is that this is creating an economic environment where Victorian businesses are struggling to attract capital investment to our state – jeopardising the capacity for our industry to build more homes.

We encourage the Victorian government to focus their attention on delivering policy outcomes that incentivise the construction of new homes, reduce the burden on business and allow the property industry to get on with delivering the housing supply that Victorians need and expect.

Those opposite like to demonise the property industry. They like to blame them for all the woes, but in fact they are the industry that will build their 80,000 new homes. Just yesterday, when asked by the Greens – the Greens that the Labor government have done a deal with to get this legislation through at the last minute, on the last sitting day of the year, with two new taxes for Victorians – about why the Premier would not call out the property industry, the Premier herself said:

... it is the property industry who help us build homes. It is the property industry and all the carpenters and all the plumbers and all the tradies that they employ that help us build more homes, that help us make sure that more Victorians have the dignity of a roof over their heads.

Danny O'Brien: Who said that?

Jess WILSON: The Premier, just yesterday, when asked a question by the Greens about why they support the property industry. But at the same time we have a government that is set on demonising the property industry, putting in place two new taxes. When asked by my colleague Mr Mulholland in the other place today what work the government had actually done on modelling, how this would increase the supply of new homes, how the increase in the vacant residential tax would supply new homes and how the tax on undeveloped land would supply new homes, the government could not provide an answer. They did not have an answer on how many new homes would be delivered because of these taxes. That is because putting a property tax on property in this state does nothing to increase the supply of new houses in Victoria.

Victoria desperately needs new homes. They need a construction industry and a property industry that have the confidence to invest in building new homes, but this government's only answer is to put in place more property taxes at a time Victorians can least afford them.

Assembly divided on Council's amendments:

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is that further amendment 1 be agreed to. The member for Sandringham has moved an amendment to the motion. He has moved that the words 'new clauses to follow clause 27' be omitted and replaced with a new clause to follow clause 27. Members supporting the member for Sandringham's amendment should vote no. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted from further amendment 1 stand part of the further amendment.

Assembly divided on omission (members in favour vote no):

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina

Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

Amendment defeated.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That further amendment 1 be agreed to.

Assembly divided on further amendment 1:

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

Amendment agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is that further amendment 2 be agreed to. The member for Sandringham has moved an amendment to the motion. He has moved that the words 'New sections 88EA to 88EC inserted' be omitted and replaced with 'New section 88EC inserted'. Members supporting the member for Sandringham's amendment should vote no. The question is:

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

Assembly divided on omission (members in favour vote no):

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard

Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Amendment defeated.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That further amendment 2 be agreed to.

Assembly divided on further amendment 2:

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments 3 to 6 agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That further amendment 7 be agreed to.

Assembly divided on further amendment 7:

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

Amendment agreed to.

The SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council requesting their agreement.

*Business of the house***Postponement**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (18:02): I move:

That remaining business be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

*Announcements***Felicitations**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (18:03): Before everyone leaves the chamber, could I take this opportunity on behalf of all members to thank you, Speaker, for your leadership and guidance over the past year. Can I thank also Bridget, Vaughn and the clerks for everything that they do to ensure that this house run smoothly. As Leader of the House, can I say how much I appreciate your timely advice and all of the support that you give to me in my role. But not just that – I know that all members of the house who are looking to bone up their knowledge and understanding of the arcane rules of this place know that you hold it all. And of course the work that you do to support the parliamentary committees is also very much appreciated by everyone in this place.

I see our good friends from Hansard, the attendants – all of the staff. We thank you so much. We roll this one out every year, so why not do it again? We thank Hansard for making everything that we say in here actually sound mildly sensible when we read it back, so we very much appreciate that.

For all of the staff here at Parliament House it has been a big and busy year, with two by-elections in one year. We know that that is certainly creates challenges for the parliamentary staff, and we thank them for that.

On behalf of the Labor Party, can I take this opportunity from the government benches to wish all of our colleagues – the Greens, the Liberals and the Nationals – a safe and happy Christmas. Season's greetings to you all, and we look forward to seeing you, if not beforehand, certainly back here in February sometime. Thank you. Merry Christmas to everyone.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (18:05): On behalf of the Liberals and Nationals can I join with the Minister for Health in thanking all of the parliamentary staff, starting with the clerks. We very much admire the way you pretend to enjoy our wit and our oratory and our humility, but we do genuinely thank you for all of the work you and your staff undertake to make this Parliament work. We are very grateful for that.

To the library staff, to the Hansard staff and to the catering staff, who politely laugh at our jokes when we order coffee and our meals, we greatly appreciate you.

Brad Battin: You tell a lot of jokes.

John PESUTTO: I do, member for Berwick. To the cleaning staff of the Parliament, to them and their families, I want them to understand – and I think I can say this on behalf of all members – that we greatly appreciate the work that you do around this Parliament. When we see you undertaking your duties, know that we are very grateful for all of the work that you do on our behalf.

Speaker, to you: you know that we often get upset that we do not seem to get the same treatment as those opposite – you know that – and you know that we argue for a broader interpretation of that relevance rule, but for all of that, Speaker, we know you still like us.

Peter Walsh interjected.

John PESUTTO: The gardeners too – I have been reminded by the Leader of the Nationals to thank the gardeners around Parliament and all of the parliamentary staff.

To our friends opposite: we know the battle is spirited and willing, but I think we like you a little bit too, and we want you to have a safe and relaxing break.

Merry Christmas and happy new year if you celebrate Christmas, or if you do not, we wish you all the best for the festive season, and we look forward to joining you in this place next year. A merry Christmas and a happy new year to all.

Advisor to the Speaker

The SPEAKER (18:07): I want to inform the house that Jason McDonald from my office will be finishing up at the end of this year. Many of you have been assisted by Jason during his time in the Speaker's office, a role he has held for five years. Jason has worked for both me and the former Speaker, and he has been a valued and respected member of the parliamentary team. I want to personally thank Jason for his professionalism, wise counsel and guidance and invaluable advice; for his friendship; and for being someone that I and others could always rely on. Jason, on behalf of the Parliament I wish you well for your next adventure, and we send our sincere thanks and warmest wishes to you and your family for a fabulous future.

Felicitations

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (18:08): Speaker, I just want to add the Greens' thanks to you, the Deputy Speaker and all the Acting Speakers for your work this year, and also to the clerks. I know that our presence in this place does not always make your life easy, but hopefully it makes it somewhat more interesting perhaps.

I would like to thank Hansard, the catering staff, the cleaning staff and all the tour guides and attendants, many of whom have been in this place since I started. Your presence and your assistance are greatly appreciated. I hope you get a nice break over the next couple of months from the government and opposition benches. Feliz Navidad.

The SPEAKER (18:08): I need to also take this opportunity, as we close out Parliament for the year, to say a big thankyou to the many people who make what we do in here possible. To the clerks – Bridget, Vaughn, Matt, Joel and Paul – and the team who work in the Legislative Assembly, thank you for your support and commitment. I have been Speaker for just over a year now, and it has been a privilege to work alongside such hardworking and dedicated staff.

Of course a big thankyou to our library staff and also to our friends in the Council – Robert McDonald and his staff. We were sad to see Robert leave the Assembly as Deputy Clerk last year, but it has certainly been a win for the Parliament overall – although I think Robert is still trying to figure out how that place actually works.

To Trish Burrows and the team in the Department of Parliamentary Services, thank you. The work of the staff in the DPS is often unrecognised, but they all play a vital role in ensuring that this place functions and that we are able to be the best possible representatives of our communities. There are too many units in DPS to mention, but I just want to pay tribute to a few in particular.

To our wonderful Hansard team, thank you for your incredible patience in sifting through hours of debate and through all the interjections and errors in speeches we make to produce a record of what takes place – and I note how fabulous they all look today in their bow ties, which is of course a tradition on the last sitting day.

To the Parliament security staff, thank you for the amazing job you all do in helping keep this precinct and our electorate offices a safe place for us to carry out the important work of representing our communities.

Thank you to the buildings and grounds staff who work so diligently to keep this place functioning and the gardens looking beautiful, to our catering staff for the long hours worked in keeping us caffeinated – although probably serving me too many coffees – and to our cleaners for keeping our workplace clean and hygienic.

Thank you also to O'Connor & Sons, the stonemasons, who, as members may have noticed, are wrapping up nearly 18 years worth of stoneworks here at Parliament. A particular mention to Kane Jenkins and John D'Angelo, who have looked after the crane operations on this project for all of those 18 years and will be serving their last day here tomorrow. It is great to see this heritage building being restored as an asset for Victorians into the future.

I also want to thank our Deputy Speaker, the member for Ashwood, for all his support and assistance this year. Being a regional MP presents challenges in carrying out my Melbourne-based duties as Speaker, and I want to acknowledge the Deputy Speaker for always being willing and available to assist me with the various duties of this job. And a big thankyou to our Acting Speakers as well, who are an immense help in ensuring the smooth running of the chamber.

To the President of the Legislative Council Shaun Leane, thank you for your friendship and support.

And a big thankyou to all of our electorate office staff, who work tirelessly and often for long hours so that people in our communities have access to us. It has been said that our electorate offices are shopfronts for democracy, and it is our dedicated electorate officers who make democracy real and accessible for our communities.

Finally, members, I wish you all a safe and happy Christmas and holiday season. I will see you back here in February.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Community safety

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (18:12): (481) My adjournment tonight is to the Premier, and the action that I seek is that the government work with the Victorian Liberals and Nationals to introduce expanded move-on laws to ensure Victoria Police have the powers they need to keep the community safe. Just on two weeks ago the member for Malvern introduced a private members bill to bring move-on laws into this Parliament. That was following the horrific incident in Caulfield on the Friday evening in which a number of individuals, anti-Israel protesters, targeted my community. It was unfortunate to see events last night in which we again saw anti-Israel protesters target visitors to our state – those that have been here visiting that have had family members either taken hostage by or, for two members, lose their lives to Hamas terrorists.

I would ask the Premier to work with the opposition to bring in these move-on laws. These move-on laws would ensure that those protesters last night that trespassed on private property at the Crowne Plaza hotel, that blockaded the escalator at the top, that did not allow those visitors to actually get into their rooms could be given a directive firstly to move on, and if that directive was not followed, for them to be arrested. We need powers; we need consequences. In the last two weeks since we tried to introduce a private members bill, we have had 1605 of my constituents sign a petition to bring back these move-on laws. We need them – we need them now. I would urge the government to do what they can to ensure safety for all Victorians.

Wyndham law courts

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (18:14): (482) Speaker, I align myself with your comments and those of the other speakers previously. My adjournment is for the Attorney-General from the other place, and the action that I seek is for the Attorney-General to join me on a visit to the Wyndham law

courts development. The Wyndham law courts, as many know here, are the largest complex of law courts outside the CBD. It will be a landmark investment in Australia's fastest growing community, creating 400 jobs. The cranes are up in the sky, and I cannot wait for the Attorney-General to join me at that project.

Swan Hill train service

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (18:14): (483) My matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is a full review of the operation of the Swan Hill train service. In August I had to raise the issue of there being no disabled toilet on the Swan Hill train service, and at this stage there is still no dedicated proper disability toilet on that train – something that is totally unacceptable in today's society. I have been contacted by a number of constituents who have told me that the 5-hour train journey home recently was without a buffet car. Parents had to explain to their children why there was no food available on that particular service. Speaker, as you would know, many of the people that use the train service from northern Victoria to Melbourne do it for medical appointments. For someone that has got diabetes or another ailment that means they need to eat regularly, to have that 5-hour journey without a buffet car is unacceptable.

The train service is valued by people from Swan Hill and Kerang that use it and even those that come down from Mildura and Robinvale on the bus to Swan Hill to catch the train to Melbourne. It is important that the minister actually ensure that V/Line are providing an appropriate service for those particular patrons on that train. That is why I am asking the minister to have a full review of the train service to ensure that we get proper disability services on the train and that the buffet car is there every trip so that no-one is caught short.

McKinnon Volley

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (18:16): (484) My adjournment matter tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Women and concerns changes to Volleyball Victoria's by-laws, which have had a detrimental impact on McKinnon volleyball's female players. The action I seek from the minister is that she makes representations to Volleyball Victoria about this matter. McKinnon volleyball club have seven women players who represented Victoria last season in the premier division. As the result of a change this year to Volleyball Victoria's state league by-laws, McKinnon volleyball has been relegated due to not having a male team in the premier division. For example, the by-laws in 2021 stated:

In addition to the entry requirements contained in By-Law 5.2, entry into the Premier divisions is expressly subject to each Metropolitan Melbourne based Club:

- entering exactly one (1) team in each Premier division ...

In 2023 it was changed to the following:

- entering exactly one (1) team per gender in each Premier division ...

While I do not want to tell anyone how to run their league, it does strike me as unfair that a group of women are unable to compete at the level which they have achieved due to the absence of a men's team. It also strikes me as a retrograde step given the great strides forward in women's sport in recent years, which I know Victoria's gender equality strategy has been part of. I therefore ask that the Minister for Women make representations to Volleyball Victoria on this matter.

Payroll tax

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:17): (485) My adjournment is to the Premier, and the action I seek is for the state Labor government to reverse their nasty new health tax, which undermines the services that doctors can provide and increases the costs of medical care for all Victorians. Medical professionals have chosen to do their job because they care about people, and they care about ensuring that people remain in good health. Yet the Labor government has decided to attack these medical professionals and risk their future viability. We know they are doing it tough. We know they are doing

it tough at this time because we know that 74 per cent of clinics are currently experiencing financial strain. Over the last year we have seen 184 clinics close their doors.

Businesses act in good faith and make decisions based on the rules that exist at the time. Over recent decades we have seen medical professionals set up in a hub model where professionals work independently in a single-service site. It is a model that is good for them and good for the community. It also helps keep the costs down for Victorians who want to use medical services. We know the cost of visiting a medical clinic is some 17 to 18 per cent lower than attending an emergency service. The state revenue decision undermines the model that health providers have set up and undermines those providers that are spread across our communities. We know it because that is what the providers are telling us. One fantastic provider in my community described the tax as ‘an existential threat’, saying that the State Revenue Office is targeting general practice clinics and planning to levy payroll tax on payments to doctors both retrospectively and ongoing. This would most certainly cause a collapse in general practice with negative impacts on both patients and the healthcare system as a whole. Further, retrospective payments for the previous five years with penalties, as is occurring in some cases at a state level, is unfair and destructive to an industry already struggling.

Those are the words of the industry. When we look at other states, we know that Queensland has provided an amnesty and New South Wales has provided an amnesty. I call on the Premier to consider the impact of these taxes on good, hardworking people who provide good, hardworking services to the community, consider the other states’ measures and consider allowing those other state measures to be applied in Victoria.

Housing

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (18:20): (486) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Housing in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate to see the Vermont South housing project. Currently construction is underway on Burwood Highway in Vermont South to establish 34 new homes in collaboration with Women’s Housing Ltd. These apartments aim to offer housing alternatives for women seeking refuge from family violence, women aged over 55 facing challenges in securing affordable housing and First Nations women. This initiative stands as one of several throughout the state dedicated to providing safe, secure and affordable housing for Victorian women, including those within my electorate of Glen Waverley. Throughout the state we are delivering 1000 homes to support survivors of domestic violence through our landmark Big Housing Build. It is excellent to see so many social housing projects progressing across Melbourne, extending safe and affordable housing to those within our communities who need it most.

This month and throughout December my colleagues and I have been engaging with Respect Victoria’s 16 days of activism, including remembering the 54 women who have lost their lives to domestic violence this year alone. It is why housing projects like this that offer safe and affordable housing for women escaping family violence are so important. Such projects are not only changing but saving lives. I am proud to be part of a government that is serious about addressing domestic violence, and the Women’s Housing Ltd Vermont South project is just one example of our commitment. I would also like to thank the minister and their team for the dedicated efforts in investing in social housing in our state. I look forward to the minister’s response, and I hope that the minister can join me to visit the site in my electorate soon.

On indulgence, I would just like to thank my team in the electorate office – Rachel, Felix, Hannah, Chunying, Dustin, Nildhara and Tom, and also James for his earlier efforts this year – in being able to get me here, help me and make sure that we serve our community well. I would also like to reiterate your comments, Speaker, in thanking the amazing team here at the Parliament of Victoria for all the work that they do. Finally, I would just like to wish the community in my electorate and their families a safe and joyous time over our coming holidays.

Arts sector support

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (18:22): (487) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Creative Industries, and the action that I seek is for the Victorian government to introduce a three-year living wage for artists trial. Art connects us with one another. It brings us joy. Art commemorates, art challenges us, art celebrates. It expands our minds, and it invites us to think differently. Art is fundamental to our society. It is a core part of Victoria's unique identity as a place to study, work and live and as a place to create. If that does not do it for you, the arts also play a key role in the Victorian economy. It contributes 7 per cent of our local economy, and 9 per cent of the Australian workforce is employed in the creative industries. Despite this, the arts are chronically and dangerously underfunded. Artists earn a pittance and have to compete for scraps, even at the height of their careers. Take, for example, musicians in one of Melbourne's most loved punk rock bands Cable Ties, an established international touring band who hardly pocket a thing from their full-time work. I hear from arts organisations all the time that are struggling with funding uncertainties and from artists who are leaving the sector in droves because they just cannot keep going. The cultural loss for Victoria is already immense.

But just because something is does not mean that it should continue to be so. A living wage for artists has been tried with great success elsewhere in the world, and the Victorian Greens propose a three-year trial for 2000 artists, where artists are paid a living wage untied to outcomes, \$46,000 a year, so they have the time and the security to keep making their work. At \$92 million a year it would cost less than a quarter of what this government gives to the racing industry each year, and the benefits for the entire state would be huge. If Labor does not support artists, we risk losing the music and the theatre and the dance and the visual arts – the art that makes us who we are – and we will all be the poorer for it.

Port Melbourne Primary School

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:25): (488) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting Port Melbourne Primary School, a thriving local school in my electorate, to see how numerous upgrades are supporting teachers and students respectively in teaching and learning. Back in 2016, \$5.496 million was provided for upgrades to the school. This included the construction of a gym, relocation of modular buildings and classroom upgrades. More recently Port Melbourne Primary School has undergone a second stage of modernisation to its facilities. In the 2019–20 state budget the school received \$784,400, and in 2020 the school received \$7.06 million. This included the construction of state-of-the-art classrooms and an admin facility to complement upgrades to sports, music and arts facilities completed back in 2019. This has given students access to modernised learning spaces as well as helping students across grades prep to year 6 get the most out of their learning. All the new developments allow the school to continue to give Port Melbourne families the world-class school their kids deserve. Once again I thank the Minister for Education for helping to improve schools in my electorate of Albert Park, as well as the government's ongoing support of education across the state.

With indulgence I will thank my electorate office staff Vicki, Peter, Zoe, Tyson, Fran – Fran is actually a parliamentary adviser – and I should say Esther as well in the EO; all of the staff in Parliament; and Isla Mithen and Ollie O'Connor, students on work experience from Albert Park College, who have helped this week.

Native timber industry

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (18:26): (489) We are nearly there; we are nearly finished. My adjournment this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is that the Premier take immediate action to ensure the timber workers that have been impacted by the closure of the native timber industry receive the support they were promised. I had an email from a constituent this week, and he has informed me that 100 per cent of his income was through VicForests. This is a family-owned business; he has not been able to draw a wage since July – nearly five months. They have now received a WorkCover instalment bill which has completely exhausted their finances, and they have to watch

their business accounts steadily dwindle with repayments for vehicle loans, business loans, insurance and other costs that have continued to come out – with no income. The previous Premier did say in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that he would support the timber industry. I know there was \$200 million allocated, but the previous Premier said, ‘If it needs more than that, then we will do that.’ I would ask that the new Premier honour those commitments so this family can have a happy Christmas. I ask that the Premier do that.

Just in closing, Speaker, I wish you and your family the best of Christmas. I hope you have a great break. I look forward to seeing you next year with your smile and occasional glare when I do something wrong, but I hope you have a great new year as well, and thank you for the year.

Reservoir Views Primary School

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (18:27): (490) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting Reservoir Views Primary School to hear from the staff and students about the great work that is underway at that school. I do appreciate that I am the final speaker for 2023, so I will try and whip through it, but that primary school is really going from strength to strength under the leadership of Steve Stafford and assistant principal Hayriye Ali. They have done tremendous work to support their diverse student body and improve the school’s inclusive practices. They have increased the number of students funded through the program for students with disabilities. They have brought health professionals onsite. They have let NDIS-funded health professionals work onsite, which we know parents really appreciate. They have funded more inclusion directly. They have embraced this government’s fantastic tutor learning initiative. They did recently commission a new First Nations mural by artist Brendan Kennedy, which I got the chance to check out. It was well underway and is probably finished by now, so thank you Brendan for your work on that. They have introduced a weekly preschool playgroup, and they have introduced a whole-of-school music program.

I could go on and on, but I will not. I just want to say it is a great school where they really do go the extra mile. Every time we doorknock in that area – and we were up in Banff Street the other month – people are very positive about the school. We know it is incumbent upon us in government when people are going that extra mile and doing great work in the community to get in and help them where we can. I ask the minister to come up so he can hear what they are up to, check out the great school and support them where possible. We thank the minister for his consideration, and I wish everyone a safe and happy parliamentary break.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (18:29): The member for Caulfield raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action that he seeks is that the Premier introduce expanded move-on laws.

The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the attention of the Attorney-General in the other place, and the action he sought is that the Attorney-General join him to visit the fantastic Wyndham law courts development.

The member for Murray Plains raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action sought by the member is a full review of the Swan Hill train service.

The member for Bentleigh raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Women, and the action that he sought was that the minister make representations to Volleyball Victoria regarding their policies that on the face of it would seem to stop women performing at the highest level.

The member for Brighton raised a matter for the attention of the Premier which actually should probably have been directed to the Treasurer, who has responsibility for payroll tax, and the action that he seeks is that the Premier review the way payroll tax is administered in this state to medical

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practitioners. But I might note that there has been no change to the way in which that payroll tax has been administered, and indeed it is the same payroll tax that the previous Liberal–National government also administered to medical practitioners.

The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing, and the action that the member seeks is that the minister join him for a visit to a Vermont South housing project. I thought it was great in the 16 days of activism to hear about this housing project that is going to change lives and provide necessary support for women and children escaping family violence.

The member for Richmond raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Creative Industries, and the action that she seeks is that the minister implement a living wage for artists.

The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. The action sought is that the minister join the member at Port Melbourne Primary School.

The member for Narracan raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action he seeks is immediate action to support timber workers in his electorate.

The member for Preston raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and he seeks that the minister join him at the fabulous Reservoir Views Primary School. I am sure he will look forward to that.

Thank you very much, Speaker – all the best to you. Happy Christmas, everyone.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, Leader of the House. Can I also thank the Manager of Opposition Business for his work in the chamber. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:33 pm.