



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 19 February 2025**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

### Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew <sup>1</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaele	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira <sup>2</sup>	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha <sup>5</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem	Northern Metropolitan	DLP
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina <sup>3</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Limbrick, David <sup>4</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard <sup>6</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

<sup>3</sup> Appointed 14 November 2024

<sup>4</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 8 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Wednesday 19 February 2025**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Petitions*

**National parks**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 40,208 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the potential for the Allan Labor Government to establish more national parks in Victoria including the Central Highlands, and Gippsland regions.

In accepting the formation of three new Central West national parks, the Victorian Government has shown disregard for the interests of bush user groups who participate in traditional recreational activities, which not only contribute to rural and regional jobs but also have a positive impact on people's well-being and the natural environment. Locking up public forests increases the risk of bushfires, placing communities and the environment in greater peril. Neglecting public land leads to overgrown tracks, the proliferation of invasive weeds and feral pests, which degrade the environment and pose a threat to native flora and fauna.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council to call on the Government to not create any new national parks and keep state forests open to public access and traditional activities.**

**Melina BATH:** As this is a petition qualifying for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move 'That the petition be taken into consideration' on Wednesday of next sitting week.

**Residential planning zones**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 34 signatures:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, respectfully urge the Legislative Council to note:

- The Allan Labor Government has announced 10 high-rise high-density zones in the municipalities of Bayside, Boroondara, Brighton, Darebin, Frankston, Glen Eira, Hume, Kingston, Monash, Moonee Valley, Stonnington, Whitehorse and Whittlesea where planning rights will be stripped from councils and communities, high rise development will occur as of right and planning control will be exercised undemocratically by the state government;
- That, in addition to a central activity district with as of right 12 storey development, these zones contain enormous "catchment areas" where planning protections will be removed, where 3 and 6 storey development can occur as of right, where municipal heritage overlays and designations will be overridden resulting in the destruction of thousands of irreplaceable heritage properties and where canopy tree protections will be overridden resulting in the loss of neighbourhood amenity and the exacerbation of heat island effects; and
- These plans are not accompanied by proper health or education service plans or plans for additional open space despite proposed massively increased local populations.

We therefore call on the state government to desist and recommence proper discussions and consultation with local communities and councils and heritage peak bodies in all 10 affected zones prior to taking any further planning actions to implement the announced high-rise high-density zones.

**Waste and recycling management**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 3001 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council to the granting of planning permit application PA23/0694 for Veolia Recycling & Recovery Pty Ltd (Veolia) by the City of Casey. The planning permit application is to construct a waste transfer station at 290 Hallam Road, Hampton Park. Planning permission was granted before Councilors had been elected and sworn in, before the rezoning has been approved by the Minister for Planning and while there is current litigation by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) against Veolia for serious breaches.

The proposed facility is within 250 metres of family homes and in the middle of densely populated areas. Residents of surrounding suburbs have not been properly informed, and those who have are extremely concerned about the serious, adverse environmental and social impacts that will result from processing 550,000 tones of putrescible and inert waste per annum. Over 1,000 objections were received but largely ignored by Casey Council and Administrators. On 12 August 2024, the EPA introduced new buffer and separation distance guidelines to protect the health and safety of residents which the City of Casey override with permit conditions.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to ensure that a waste transfer station is not constructed in the South-Eastern Metropolitan region by overturning approval of planning permit application PA23/0694, rejecting development license application APP032219, and investigating the processes which have led to the planning permit application being approved by the City of Casey.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** As this is a petition qualifying for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move ‘That the petition be taken into consideration’ on Wednesday of next sitting week.

### **Fyansford Paper Mill**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 2018 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the need to restore the Fyansford Paper Mill’s sudden water race breach, which is on Crown land within the Barwon River.

The 1878 Fyansford Paper Mill and its water race is Australia’s only intact heritage paper mill. The Fyansford Paper Mill and water race are classified by the National Trust of Victoria as holding State significance and are included in Victoria’s heritage register, VHR H0743, and heritage inventory, VHR H7721. Being on Crown Land, under the Heritage Act 2017, it is the Heritage Council and its Executive Director’s responsibility to conserve locations of this nature. This Crown land area has endured decades of neglect.

An independent environmental assessment stated that restoration of water flow is required to restore ecological values, including a platypus breeding area. Prior to amalgamation, the Shire of Bannockburn and their contractors carried out regular maintenance and restoration of this precious heritage area.

The petitioners therefore **request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to approve funding to restore the Fyansford Paper Mill water race wall breach, and to clear the water race of noxious weeds, rubbish, dead tree and non-native plants to enable water to flow again.**

**Bev McARTHUR:** I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### ***Bills***

#### **Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025**

##### *Introduction and first reading*

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:37): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Wrongs Act 1958 to make certain organisations vicariously liable for the abuse of children by persons akin to employees of those organisations and to consequentially amend the Victoria Police Act 2013 and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Rachel PAYNE:** I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**



*Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General – Major Projects Performance Reporting 2024, February 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule No. 1.

*Production of documents***Duck hunting**

**The Clerk:** I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 17 February 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 20 March 2024 on the motion of Ms Purcell and further to the government's initial response on 30 April 2024 relating to native bird hunting. The government has identified 36 documents within the scope of the order. A claim of executive privilege has been made over 15 documents in full. I further table 21 documents together with schedules of the identified documents.

*Business of the house***Notices****Notices of motion given.***Committees***Legal and Social Issues Committee***Membership*

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That Anasina Gray-Barberio be a participating member of the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee.

**Motion agreed to.***Members statements***Clyde Grammar**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:47): Last week I had the great pleasure of attending Clyde Grammar school in Clyde North along with my colleague Mr Tarlami for the official sod-turning ceremony for the stage 2 part of the campus. Clyde Grammar school is a terrific independent school in the very fast growing area of Clyde North. It complements the other Catholic and many government schools that have been built, including the three new government schools that have opened just this year. Clyde Grammar currently serves students from prep to grade 5, and it has been increasing its years year by year. Two years ago, when I first visited the school, it was great to meet with the then grade 3s, who are now in grade 5, and I have seen them continue to develop and grow. The first stage of the school was supported with \$5 million of funding by the Allan Labor government, but by the time these current grade 5s get to grade 7 the school will be at absolute maximum capacity, which is why it is so important that we are continuing to invest in great schools like Clyde Grammar, with funding of \$3.6 million towards stage 2. With these works about to commence, it is going to be wonderful to see not just new classrooms but also a music centre and basketball court – basketball being of course one of the fastest growing sports in the Casey region. It was terrific for us to join with principal Leanne Evans, with the students and with members of the CSV board to celebrate what is going to be a very exciting next chapter for this terrific local school.

**Vivekananda Society of Australia**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:49): It was a privilege to attend the Vivekananda Society of Australia's Yuwa Diyas 2025, bringing together hundreds of young Australians to showcase their talents and reaffirm the crucial role of youth in shaping a brighter future. It was great to witness cultural performances by young children and youth, which added to the vibrancy of the occasion. It was moving to see the Vivekananda Society of Australia take a stand on an important issue, which is youth crime in Victoria, raising awareness and support for the community. Thanks to the founder and president of the Vivekananda Society of Australia, my good friend Yogesh Bhatt, for putting together this wonderful event.

**Victorian Mosque Open Day**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:49): It was great to join my friends at the Islamic Community Milli Gorus Meadow Heights Mosque for Victorian Mosque Open Day, which is an essential part of Victoria's multifaith and multicultural calendar, in conjunction with the Islamic Council of Victoria.

**St George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:50): It was also my pleasure to attend the St George's festival at St George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Thornbury over the weekend. Thank you to George Ibrahim and to the reverend fathers for hosting me and hosting thousands throughout the day in Thornbury for a wonderful family event.

**Animal welfare**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:50): Last year investigators from the Farm Transparency Project set out to document routine legal cruelty such as blunt force trauma to kill piglets and castration without pain relief. This is something that they often do as investigators – they have exposed many factory farms and slaughterhouses over the past year – but this time they discovered something much more sinister. They documented footage of a man committing horrific acts of bestiality on a pig. I have spoken about it before in this place. This pig was confined to a sow stall, unable to move or escape, which is completely legal here in this state. In a shameful display of our weak laws – without going into too much detail – only some of the acts he committed are actually a crime under our bestiality laws, but they are not the laws that I want to speak about today. Despite the Carag Carag man being charged, one year on the investigator who exposed this cruelty has now been charged with trespass for documenting acts of bestiality on a pig. The maximum sentence she is facing for her supposed crime is higher than the maximum sentence for bestiality. Let that sink in for a second. This person who should be thanked for stopping what was going on at this farm is potentially facing tougher penalties. Our government might not support her, but today I want to express my solidarity and thank her for everything she has done for animals and for Olivia the pig, and I will stand by her throughout this process.

**Bushfires**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (09:52): My region of Western Victoria has experienced significant fire activity this summer: the Little Desert, the southern and eastern parts of the Grampians and then a few weeks later the northern part of the Grampians. Together with Minister for Emergency Services Vicki Ward and Minister for Local Government Nick Staikos I visited Pomonal and Halls Gap on 2 January. Since then I have also visited Dunkeld, Dimboola and Nhill and heard firsthand the impact of the fires on those communities – significantly, the tourism and business part of the impact. I have also toured the incident control centre in Horsham, where people told me of the physical losses: the Little Desert Nature Lodge, buildings, fences, pasture and stock. They also told me stories of how communities come together – about Dimboola residents working to make sure their less mobile and elderly neighbours were safe and housed after they had to evacuate their wonderful little town. They have told me about the losses to small business across the district even when well out

of range of the fires themselves. Temporary closures and cancelled bookings at what is usually the busiest time of the year have hit many businesses hard in this region. I want to thank the many residents and small business owners, local government councillors and staff and the staff at the incident control centre for all that they have done to continue responding to this fire.

### **Melbourne Airport rail link**

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:53): The \$3 billion third runway at Melbourne Airport has been given the go-ahead by the federal government and is expected to be completed by 2031. From the media releases you would think it was the best thing to ever happen to this state: it is set to boost Victoria's economy by some \$6 billion each year, it will increase passenger numbers and freight capacity and it will create tens of thousands of jobs. Putting aside a large grain of salt, if the airport's capacity is going to be increased, the government needs to prioritise the equally critical and long-promised Melbourne Airport rail. Seventy per cent of the workers at Melbourne Airport travel in from the western suburbs, and they have no dependable public transport to get them to work. The airport rail project will provide a cost- and time-efficient and sustainable public transport alternative to the infrequent and unreliable buses that often take hours. It will also provide massive cost-of-living relief to workers who are forced to rely on expensive private transport, pay Ned Kelly inspired parking charges at the airport and traverse the already hopelessly congested CityLink tollway. People of the west are tired of being left behind and taken for granted. If the government is listening to the people of the west, as advertised, then it must prioritise the development of the airport rail link, starting with an immediate and comprehensive upgrade to the Sunshine station.

### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region schools**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:55): I rise to update the house about the Allan Labor government's unwavering commitment to public education in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. While those opposite dislike hearing about it, we will never stop supporting and advocating for our public schools, because we know that public education changes lives and it is the engine room for our economy and our economic prosperity. The official completion last week of two recent investments demonstrates this commitment. At Heatherwood School, a specialist developmental school in Donvale, we have delivered significant updates, including a refurbished admin building, new multipurpose hall with a music room and amenities and a brand new classroom facility for block D. A new gymnasium connected to block D also provides a valuable undercover space that will benefit both students and the wider community, because every child deserves every chance and opportunity to access high-quality public education.

Recently in Wollert, which has been added to the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, I was pleased to attend, with the Minister for Education and the member for Mill Park Lily D'Ambrosio in the other place, the opening of Wirrigirri Primary School, which is ensuring local families have access to high-quality education close to home. The school welcomed students for the first time just a couple of weeks ago, offering enrolments from prep to grade 6 under its inaugural leadership by principal Bec Spink. The name Wirrigirri Primary School was chosen in consultation with the community and traditional owners. I was very proud to attend that school and see its opening and all those wonderful students attending high-quality public education.

### **Glenroy Neighbourhood House**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:56): I rise today to acknowledge the important work of Glenroy Neighbourhood House. Neighbourhood houses are the beating heart of our communities, with empowerment as a central principle of their community development and service. Glenroy Neighbourhood House walks these values. On my visit last week I witnessed their programs that encourage active participation, social and recreational programs, learning, leadership opportunities and weekly food relief program, which is only made possible by their team of volunteers and Foodbank Victoria. In a cost-of-living crisis, demand for their food relief program has surged, with more people than ever seeking support and some travelling over an hour to get food relief. This

program also provides multifaceted support for complex intersectional challenges related to mental health, addiction and financial hardship. Food insecurity does not exist in isolation and Glenroy Neighbourhood House understands this. They provide holistic wraparound support that treats people with dignity and enhances people's ability to have control over their lives. Community organisations like Glenroy Neighbourhood House cannot keep filling the gaps. They need sustainable ongoing government support. Rising living costs, insecure work and lack of affordable housing are pushing more Victorians into crisis, and frontline services like Glenroy Neighbourhood House are stretched to their limits. I want to thank the team at Glenroy Neighbourhood House for their compassion, inclusivity and care for the community of Glenroy and beyond.

### **Cost of living**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:58): Hopefully some households across Victoria are breathing a little easier today after the Reserve Bank's decision to cut interest rates last night. It is a small step, a small amount of relief, but I think it is welcome news for everyone, and it is about time that those cuts came through. We know that households have struggled with increased costs in recent years. You can see it in the economic data, you can feel it in the shopping centres and it is front of mind for everyone we talk to in our community. There are positive signs in the economy: inflation is down 2.4 per cent in the latest quarter, down from a height of around 7.8 per cent in September 2022. There have been four quarters of real wages growth in this country, and now interest rates are coming down. This interest rate cut will not solve every problem, but it is a good start, and alongside the improving economic data, Labor, particularly the state Labor government, is helping Victorians with the cost of living. We have got the \$400 school saving bonus, which is providing millions to families at the start of the school year. We have got breakfast clubs rolling out in primary schools, providing free meals at the start of the day. We have got free kinder for our three- and four-year-olds. We have got free dental care. We have got free reading glasses for kids at school. We have got free tampons and pads in public schools. And there are vouchers to help with school sports costs. There is always more to do with the cost of living. The economic data is improving and Labor is there to help as well.

### **BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:00): I have got to tell you the weather in Melbourne well and truly came out last Sunday, when I had the privilege of joining my colleagues Lee Tarlamis, Belinda Wilson, Pauline Richards and Iwan Walters at the Southside Racing course in Cranbourne for the BAPS Australia celebration of peace festival. This event marked the beginning of a remarkable 20-day celebration honouring the historic visit of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj to Victoria at the incredible age of 92. With Melbourne and Sydney as his only stops in Australia, devotees and volunteers from across the country have gathered for this rare and significant occasion. Events like this bring together people of all ages in a shared spirit of faith, culture and selfless service, strengthening Victoria's diverse communities. BAPS plays a crucial role in building bridges between cultural groups, fostering tolerance, cooperation and social harmony. His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj's visit is a celebration of peace, uniting Hindus and others through spiritual, cultural and social activities. A temporary exhibition has been created by BAPS volunteers, and it is truly something special. It showcases Hindu mandir architecture and its role in daily life, instilling values that benefit all Victorians. This festival is a shining example of how faith can inspire unity, joy and understanding in our multicultural society.

### **Ukrainian Museum of Australia**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:01): I recently had the privilege of visiting the Ukrainian Museum of Australia in North Melbourne, and it was truly an unforgettable experience. During my visit I was guided through the Treasures of Ukraine exhibition by museum director Maru Jarockyj and the passionate team of volunteers who dedicate themselves to preserving and sharing the remarkable pieces in the museum's collection. Treasures of Ukraine is an extraordinary exhibition

offering a stunning journey through millennia of culture, tradition and artistic expression. The exhibition showcases a rich array of artefacts, including intricate wooden carvings, vibrant paintings, exquisite ceramic sculptures, embroidery, religious icons, antique Slavic texts and the captivating pysanky, which are Ukrainian Easter eggs adorned with intricate designs in beeswax and natural dyes. Among the many priceless treasures on display are UNESCO-listed Kosiv ceramics from the Carpathian Mountains, celebrated for their exceptional craftsmanship. The complexity and precision required to create the detailed patterns on the museum's artefacts is awe inspiring, leaving visitors with profound admiration for the artisans who brought them to life.

The museum's collection, which has been lovingly curated since its founding in 1976, includes pieces donated by the local Ukrainian community and other generous benefactors. Together they form a vibrant tapestry of Ukraine's rich heritage, one that teaches us invaluable lessons about the triumphs, struggles and resilience of the Ukrainian people throughout history. This collection is a testament to Ukraine's unbreakable spirit, as exemplified by their nation's defiant response to Russia's unprovoked and unlawful war. The preservation of such collections is vital in ensuring that the history and heritage of Ukraine are safeguarded for future generations. Heartfelt congratulations to the entire team at the Ukrainian Museum of Australia for their unwavering commitment to protecting and sharing the invaluable history of Ukraine.

### *Production of documents*

#### **Planning policy**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:03): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) was not specifically considered in *Plan Melbourne*;
  - (b) Victoria's housing statement sets a target to build 800,000 homes by 2034, and *Plan Melbourne* states 1.6 million homes will be required by 2051;
  - (c) according to government documents, the SRL East precincts are intended to accommodate 70,000 homes alone;
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:
  - (a) the latest version of *Plan Melbourne*, be it a wholesale revision, draft, addendum or similar;
  - (b) reports from consultancies that have been or are intended to be used to inform an updated version of *Plan Melbourne*;
  - (c) submissions from third parties, including municipalities, that have been, or are intended to be, used to inform an updated version of *Plan Melbourne*; and
  - (d) any material presented in the last 12 months to the Minister for Planning regarding changes to *Plan Melbourne*.

The government claims to have a bold vision for housing and infrastructure to support that housing, but where is it?

*Members interjecting.*

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** You have spoken about *Plan Melbourne*. You have spoken for a long time about an update to *Plan Melbourne*, but we have not seen it. The plan for Victoria is being kept secret because it would expose what Victorians already know: Labor has no plans to deliver the housing that we need. If the government was confident in its plan, it would release it, not try to hide it and not try to hide any documents supporting that particular release. They are covering up their failure to deliver the housing and infrastructure where it is needed. Victorians are supposed to believe that the SRL precincts of SRL East will create 70,000 homes, but the government cannot tell us when that first home will be built. When will it be built?

*Members interjecting.*

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I would offer interjections, but they probably do not have any as to when the first home will be built around the Suburban Rail Loop. I know Ms Terpstra's Minister for Transport Infrastructure fails to invite her to forums like the North East Link forum that we held, where we did ask for any government MP to attend and they declined on behalf –

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, I have been sitting here for the last few minutes listening to Mr Mulholland's long diatribe of disinformation and misleading the house, and I would ask that he stop spreading falsehoods in this chamber. If Mr Mulholland wants to say that government MPs were invited to community forums, that is untrue, and also –

**The PRESIDENT:** Ms Terpstra, I do not think that is a point of order.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Well, I think it should be. Mr Mulholland should stop spreading disinformation.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think people have the privilege in here to contribute how they see fit as long as they do not accuse individuals or sitting MPs of impropriety.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Particularly in making a contribution on the facts, so I will continue.

**Michael Galea:** Why do you oppose new homes?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I am absolutely not opposing new homes. Right now we have secrecy, spin and skyrocketing house prices, and what we are asking for is a government plan to deal with that. Greenfields housing is stalling because the government are stalling housing supply, and it is important to remember even with all the things they have done during the housing statement we had more homes approved in four years than Labor have had in a decade. I understand that the Labor Party have all of a sudden had a change of heart, but for eight of those 10 years they had Richard Wynne as planning minister putting height restrictions in places like Brunswick, putting height restrictions in the Southern Metropolitan Region, blocking development in our CBD and blocking development all over the state. The Labor Party literally introduced a bill prioritising objectors. I know Ms Symes spoke on that bill; a number of other colleagues, like the member for Macedon, spoke on that bill and spoke about how glorious it was that we were enabling objectors at VCAT. So for eight of the 10 years – you have had a change of tune now; I understand that – this government spent blocking development and halting development in the CBD. Mr Erdogan when he was on council supported putting height restrictions in places like Brunswick. Seriously – this government wants to talk about the housing crisis? It created it.

*Members interjecting.*

**Richard Welch:** On a point of order, President, I cannot hear over all the interjections.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will ask Mr Mulholland to continue uninterrupted.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Victoria is losing our competitive edge because we are failing to unlock industrial and commercial precincts and land supply, and this government is to blame. They have failed on the housing crisis and should support this motion.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:09): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion as proposed by Mr Mulholland. Again, because they have changed the standing orders on us, I have 5 minutes or so to respond to this. Their whole premise is to gag the government and prevent us from properly responding to this motion. I note that when those opposite were in government they always blocked documents motions and never provided any transparency around documents, yet our government is not blocking this motion.

**Renee Heath:** On a point of order, President, I believe it is now Ms Terpstra misleading the house, so I just ask that you bring her back.

**The PRESIDENT:** There is no point of order.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Because I am the lead speaker I can say what I like pretty much, just as Mr Mulholland could. As I was about to say before I was rudely interrupted, the government will not be opposing this documents motion, because we never do because we do not have a problem with transparency, unlike those opposite. The diatribe that we listened to just now was a complete and utter shambles and a joke, and I look forward very much to telling everyone in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region about how those opposite on those opposition benches actually oppose the Suburban Rail Loop, because this is a very popular project. People in my region deserve access to public transport. They currently do not have it. The people who live in my region in Manningham and those areas – those kids want to be able to access university. Rather than taking four buses and hours to get there, Suburban Rail Loop East will actually give them the capacity to get on a train to get to either Deakin University or Monash University.

But you do not care about that over there because what you want to do is do nothing. All you want to do is sit there and criticise rather than actually give access to public transport to people who need it and to kids who need it. They want to live where they grew up, and they want to have access to good university and education opportunities. But no, you just want to get in your expensive European cars and drive 3 kilometres up the road into your employer-sponsored car park. But those kids need public transport. All they have got is buses, and they are sitting in gridlocked roads because you lot never built anything. You never built anything and you never will, because people do not have confidence in your ability to deliver anything. At least people say to us, ‘We might not like you, but you get stuff done.’ We absolutely get stuff done. We are building big projects like the Suburban Rail Loop. We are also doing roads because we realise that you cannot just do one thing, you have got to do a lot of things. You have got to do public transport access and you have also got to build roads. Roads like North East Link are going to remove 15,000 trucks from local roads in the community that I live in and that I have seen over the last 10, 15 years. Roads like Rosanna Road are completely gridlocked with traffic because you lot did nothing.

If you want to talk about housing, how about I remind you that the Morrison Liberal government for 10 years did not invest a dollar in public housing. You have gone quiet over there now, haven’t you? You have got absolutely nothing to say. I am telling you, what we just had to listen to here was a complete and utter diatribe of garbage from those opposite about how we do nothing. It was complete and utter garbage and misleading the house. All you want to do is post on social media and go, ‘Oh, look at us; we’ve got answers to things.’ You have got answers to nothing. I tell you what, if this lot ever got in government, our roads would be further gridlocked and the public transport system would be in complete chaos and disarray.

As I said, we have invested \$400 million in local infrastructure projects. We are going to see an enormous uptick in housing being built so that kids and locals can live in communities where they grew up. That is what people want, that is what people are telling us they want, and we are listening to it.

**John Berger** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Except for Brighton and Camberwell and those areas where they oppose anyone having access to housing at all.

**Michael Galea:** A lot of people there still want it too, though.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Correct. But again, they oppose everything always. That is what they are doing; they oppose everything always. Whilst criticising this government they have absolutely no plans. I am yet to hear any tangible idea from those opposite. They are the worst opposition in history. Where are the ideas? Where are the suggestions? Where is the positive, optimistic plan about anything? There is nothing. All they want to do is absolutely criticise.

We will get on with delivering because we know what people want. We know they want access to housing close to public transport, close to education opportunities and close to where they live. Like I said, the Suburban Rail Loop is an incredibly popular project that has been voted on twice by the

Victorian public. It has been voted on twice and it is popular in my region. I cannot wait to campaign on this. I cannot wait to tell everybody in my region how those opposite sat in this chamber and soaked up time talking about how much they oppose this project. I know Mr Galea and Mr Berger will also join me in taking every opportunity to tell Victorian electors how much you oppose public transport and how you do not want people to access public transport. We will not be opposing this motion.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:14): I am pleased to rise to speak on motion 816 regarding some documents. What we have with the Suburban Rail Loop generally is a lack of transparency – the way it seems to move around from being a rail project to a housing project to a university link to an airport rail. The idea that we can add 70,000 homes and make them affordable to people while simultaneously taking windfall gains tax, Suburban Rail Loop tax, value capture levies et cetera means that all of these policies are very confused and pulling in very different directions. The community understand that. The property developers understand that, because they are not investing. The councils understand this, because certainly their rights have been eroded and therefore through that the rights of the local community to have a say in what happens to their community.

There are a whole series of fallacies that we have heard today about how this provides housing. It does not provide housing, because if you are going to tax the developers who are building the houses \$11 billion, that cost goes on to the nature of the properties being built. The only way you can absorb those costs is to make high-yield properties, which means that you are not building houses that people can live in. Certainly there are not 70,000 people waiting to live where they grew up in \$800,000 to \$1 million apartments. In terms of basic scrutiny of the strategy on something that is the most expensive project ever undertaken and that will bankrupt the state, having scrutiny of the project that underpins that is not unreasonable. It is quite sensible, and anyone calm, cool and collected would understand that and would not oppose it.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:16): I am absolutely delighted to speak to Mr Mulholland's documents motion with respect to *Plan Melbourne* because it gives us the opportunity to talk about the exceptionally significant work that is being done, particularly by the Minister for Planning, to develop a plan for more housing and more opportunity not just in Melbourne but across Victoria, because that is what this government is focused on. It is about creating homes, creating opportunity, not just in Melbourne but right across Victoria. That is exactly what the plan for Victoria announced by the government as part of the housing statement, after undertaking extensive consultations throughout 2024, is exactly designed to do – to build more housing in this state so that more Victorians have the opportunity to live in the communities that they want to live in, so that they have got the homes that provide them with access to jobs and access to schools and the opportunity to live somewhere close to their family or close to where they grew up. That is what is driving Labor's policy agenda in the housing and building space. It is to give more Victorians the opportunity to have a home close to the communities they want to live in, and it is working.

In the last 12 months Victoria has led the nation in terms of the approvals of new homes, the approvals of new dwellings. There were about 60,000 new approvals in the last 12 months – more than Queensland, more than New South Wales. There were more buildings actually completed, more dwellings actually completed, in Victoria in the last 12 months than in any other state – more than New South Wales, more than Queensland. More homes were completed in Victoria in the last 12 months than in any other state – more than New South Wales, more than Queensland. That is what this government is focused on, and our plan to build more homes and activity centres across Melbourne, our plan for more housing right across the state, will continue to deliver the housing and opportunities that our state and its residents so absolutely need.

We are backing in that investment in housing with investment in the kind of social infrastructure that we need. We know – Mr Galea knows; he was on the inquiry with me last year – that more than half of all the government schools built and opened in this country in the last five years were right here in Victoria. We are building more schools. We have got new hospitals that are opening. We are building roads, we are building community infrastructure, we are upgrading parks and we are building the



transport links that our state needs for the future, and we are doing all that so we can have more homes for Victorians to live in.

The documents that Mr Mulholland is seeking are going to show an incontrovertible truth, and that is that under Labor homes are being built right across Melbourne and right across Victoria, and our plans to build and approve more homes are going to have more homes being built in communities where people want to live. That is what the documents Mr Mulholland's motion is seeking will show, because that is exactly what this Labor government is delivering.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:20): I am also very exercised to be up here today speaking on yet another short-form documents motion from those opposite, and it is nice to see that they have at least gone to the effort of having three members in the chamber for it. If I had the time, I would love to go into many of the arguments that have already been so well canvassed by both Ms Terpstra and Mr Batchelor, but I will leave those remarks as they stand.

My first observation on this particular motion is that it is rather interesting, because it actually appears now, Mr Mulholland, that you are probably well aware that we are already well into consultation for Plan Victoria, which is not just *Plan Melbourne*. You extensively used the words '*Plan Melbourne*' – I believe five times – in this motion. This is a government that is invested in all Victorians, including those in regional Victoria, not just those in metropolitan Melbourne. That is exactly why we are doing Plan Victoria –

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: Because we actually do, Mr Batchelor – yes, we care about the whole state. We do not just care about NIMBYs in Brighton and Hawthorn.

The other thing that struck me in reading this is that it is calling for documents, and particularly point 1(a) alleges that the Suburban Rail Loop was not specifically considered in *Plan Melbourne*. I am not sure if you have been doing your homework properly, Mr Mulholland – I know you have been busy fending off the attacks from Mrs McArthur for your leadership role –

**A member** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: Two votes, yes. If you go onto the website of *Plan Melbourne* you will find a 2019 document – yes, 2019, only six years ago – a specific, nine-page addendum to *Plan Melbourne*.

President, at this point I would seek leave to table this document for the benefit of Mr Mulholland.

**Leave refused.**

**Michael GALEA**: This is an extraordinary situation. They are here today calling on the government to provide documents. I have just attempted to provide for Mr Mulholland's benefit a document in the chamber. I have tried to actually help him, assist him, on the very point that he is seeking information about the Suburban Rail Loop as it pertains to *Plan Melbourne*. As I said, it is the customary practice of this government not to oppose such motions. But perhaps we should make an exception, because apparently you do not want the documents – you do not want to actually see a nine-page document which goes to the heart of what you are saying. It undermines your whole argument. I realise that, Mr Mulholland. If you had done your homework properly, you might have realised that. In an effort to help this chamber and in an effort to help those opposite to understand, I was happy to table that document, but apparently those opposite are not interested in actually getting any documents out of this motion. If they were, they would have consulted this nine-page document. They would have actually read through it. They clearly have not done so; they have not done their homework once again. That is because, I am sure, they are too busy fighting with themselves, fighting against Mrs McArthur – she is coming for your role – and fighting against the many NIMBYs in their party, who I am sure are going to overrule any aspirations you might have on housing, Mr Mulholland.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions***Sessional orders**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:23): I move:

That until the end of the session, unless otherwise ordered by the Council, sessional order 2 is revoked and replaced with the following sessional order to come into operation on the next sitting week:

**2. Order of business – Wednesday**

Standing Orders 5.02(2) and (3) are suspended and the following order of business will apply on Wednesday –

Messages

Formal business

Members' statements (up to 15 members)

Private member bills – moving second readings of bills for which precedence has been ordered

Short form documents motions (up to 2 motions)

General business

**At 12.00 noon** Questions

General business (continues)

**At 5.15 pm, or after 300 minutes of general business has elapsed (whichever is later)**

Statements on tabled papers and petitions (30 minutes)

Petitions (qualifying for debate) (30 minutes)

Government business (maximum 60 minutes)

Adjournment (up to 20 members).

This makes a modest change to the order of non-government business – general business. It does it –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** President, I am just trying to make a sensible –

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Mr Davis, without assistance, please.

**David DAVIS:** What this does is make a modest change to non-government business – to general business – and indeed allow a clarity that non-government MPs who wish to move –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** President, we might want to just stop the incessant interjections over here. What it will ensure is that there is an opportunity for non-government members to move a second reading; it will ensure that there is an opportunity for up to two – so it will cap the number of documents motions in the short form; and then it will enable the three 90-minute slots to operate and allow up to 10 minutes in the 300 minutes for the opportunity occasionally for divisions and so forth – that is additional time.

What we know has happened a few times is that government members have kicked up a bit and decided to try and filibuster and run out the day in an unconstructive way and to do that with the explicit aim of running the third 90-minute slot out at 5:15. What we want to do is make it clear that the three 90-minute motions will operate and that the three who are rostered on from the non-government parties will have the opportunity to run their motions.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** President, there is an incessant series of interjections.

**The PRESIDENT:** There is a bit of incessant interjecting. I think it is Mr Galea who can rein it in, and Mr Batchelor has got a booming voice. Can we please rein it in. Mr Davis, without assistance.

**David DAVIS:** There are a number of changes that we could make to sessional orders, for both non-government days and more broadly. We are happy to discuss those at the Procedure Committee, and I am going to suggest that we –

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Galea, I am not going to kick you out, because you are going to take the chair now, otherwise you would be hitting the showers. Over to you.

**David DAVIS:** I am trying to be thoughtful here and to make it clear that what we seek to do today is to make this change to sessional orders so that the ability is there for the three 90-minute slots to operate without interference. It is clear that 5:15 is the objective, and we can work our way through that. President, just before you leave, I might just say that I would be asking that you perhaps convene a meeting of the Procedure Committee to look at a number of matters. I think there a number of matters that we could look at at the Procedure Committee. The Leader of the Government has raised adjournments as a matter, and I am happy to have that discussion. I am yet to meet a non-government member who is in favour of cutting the time on adjournments, but we are happy to have that discussion. Equally, we have a number of issues with the way the government is handling documents and the return of documents, and we would want to discuss that at the Procedure Committee.

What I am suggesting is that we pass this motion today and that there can be further discussions on these matters and other matters at the Procedure Committee. We are quite open to those discussions. Either the President can convene that himself or, if necessary, I would be happy to move by leave a very short motion that the President convene a meeting of the Procedure Committee. I am just trying to be thoughtful here. I indicate that this is an important motion to ensure that non-government MPs are able to move the motions that they seek to move and to get their proper time allowance. What I am concerned about is that for interruptions – there have been examples of where it was the government in fact, but for whatever interruptions that could occur – we have an arrangement where the three slots in particular are secured and able to be delivered. That is what this motion seeks to do. The 300 minutes is comprised of two parts: three times 90 is 270, plus 10 minutes if there was a vote on each of those motions. Often there is not a vote, as people in this chamber would know, so the 300 minutes is generous. But having said that, the aim – and I make this commitment here – is that 5:15 is the objective, and I think through cooperation across the chamber by both non-government members and government members we can easily get to the 5:15 time as a routine arrangement. This does not impact government business in a negative way. It moves all of the matters after general business a little later if it went over the 5:15 time, and that would be a reasonable outcome to ensure that the 90-minute slots are preserved.

If the government is happy to work with this, we are happy to work with them on this. The crossbench as a group I think have a strong view –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** I have just laid out some mechanisms so that we can talk about these matters but broader matters as well. I have nominated one that the Leader of the Government has herself nominated and indeed has a motion on, which has been sitting on the notice paper. I have nominated one area that I would like to discuss as well.

**Lee Tarlamis** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** This is on the notice paper. We are offering a sensible way forward here, a way that will guarantee that non-government business is preserved in a reasonable way and we can go forward with a very clear and strong outcome.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:32): I will keep my contribution fairly brief. We will be supporting this motion today, and I thank Mr Davis for putting it forward. I think all of us on a Wednesday have at some point experienced the problem of potentially running out of time. It is a situation that arises and we often have no control over how that has come about; we just happened to have drawn the short straw and have the third spot of the day. We would like to get to a vote; we realise the clock is going to run down. Sometimes we have been able to get the cooperation of the house to get people to agree to pull speakers and limit what they say on different things so we can get to a vote, but sometimes that has not suited the politics. That is fine, but it has meant that if you happen to have the third spot you cannot get to a vote on something. This is something we have tried different ways of working through amongst the crossbench and the opposition, and we still find that on a Wednesday time mysteriously often blows out through various interruptions through the day.

I think this is a good outcome. It does not impact government business days. Putting aside that this was something that we ran up against last week, it has occurred on a number of different occasions and I am hoping that the effect of this is that it will actually impose a bit of discipline. As Mr Davis said, we all want to get out of here too; 5:15 is still the aim, but what it allows for is each 90-minute slot to be completed and divisions to occur if they need to occur. If we get through all of that in time, then 5:15 still stays as the deadline. What we found in most of our experiences is that we run out of time by 5 or 6 minutes at most. It is rarely much more than that. This really just builds in a bit of a buffer so that we can ensure that everyone gets their fair allocation.

It is particularly an issue for crossbenchers, who do not have many slots through the year to put something forward in this chamber. We do not get that many opportunities. Some of the crossbenchers might only get two spots a year, and if they are faced with having the third spot of the day they run out of time. I think it is only fair that they should be able to get to a vote even if what they are putting forward is something where it would be much more desirable in a political sense not to get to a vote on it. It has suited us on some occasions for something not to have gone to a vote, but it is not how this place should work.

I agree with Mr Davis that this is something that the Procedure Committee can and should look at. We can implement it and see how it is working for the chamber. I am very happy to provide a commitment that if there is an issue with that and the committee comes back with a recommendation to make some sort of further change or adjustment because we have found that it is not working for whatever reason then we will consider that as well as other changes to our sessional orders that they might be wishing to put forward. I will note that that is a committee, like many of the committees in this place, that is government controlled and there is no representation from anyone on the crossbench on that committee, so it is just something that I point out. I would implore the members of that committee to at least engage with the crossbench in formulating any recommendations to this place, because I feel that we do have a legitimate place here. Wednesday is the day when we get to make our contributions to this Parliament. The functioning of this chamber impacts us as well, and it would be welcome if our views could be taken into consideration.

I will leave it at that. I was hopeful we would land in a place where the whole chamber could agree on a way forward there. It appears that that is not going to be the case; I may yet be surprised. But as it stands, we will be supporting the motion that is before us that Mr Davis has put forward.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:36): I rise to make a contribution on this motion standing in Mr Davis's name, which is effectively to make a change to the sessional orders. I have had the benefit of listening to Mr Davis's contribution and also to Dr Mansfield's contribution. Not once throughout the contributions did I hear either Mr Davis or Dr Mansfield make mention of the implications that this will have on Parliament House staff. Whilst Mr Davis tried to downplay the extension of time that will necessarily happen as a consequence of this change, what they have failed to take into account is that Wednesday does not have a dinner break. We have no dinner break programmed into the order of proceedings on a Wednesday, so that has an impact on staff. What might seem like a simple change would actually add at least 1 hour and 50 minutes when we do not use our

government business slot or 2 hours and 50 minutes when we do, so that is adding an additional 2 or 3 hours to the day. Again, there is no consideration of what that might mean to the staff. Mr Davis, you want to have WorkSafe Victoria turn up here again – we have had this in the past when we have done ridiculous all-nighters and the poor staff had to be here for hours and hours on end without a break – because you do not care about workers, you only care about wanting to grandstand.

I note Mr Davis admitted in his contribution that the opposition are doing this because they are unhappy with the way that government is responding to documents motions, so there really is a fake premise.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** That is what you said, and I am happy to go to the *Hansard*, Mr Davis, because I listened very carefully to what you said. You said that you are not happy with the way the government is responding to documents motions and that is the real intent of this: ‘Let’s punish the government. Let’s silence the government.’ A very important convention, which I have heard mentioned many times not only in this chamber but also on committees, is that you should not spring things on either party – the government or the opposition or whoever is in the chamber – and you have failed to honour that convention. You would not talk to the government. You have sprung this on us at the last minute. There has been no proper opportunity to discuss all of the implications and one of the very important ones, which I have just pointed out. Had you agreed to refer it to the Procedure Committee in the first place we would have been able to go through this in a lot more detail.

I was just talking to my colleague Mr Batchelor here, and I note that there are no Greens members on the Procedure Committee. I just heard Dr Mansfield talk about how they were concerned about how they manage their time, but if they were actually concerned about this, they might show up and want to be on the Procedure Committee. I am a member of the Procedure Committee, and there has been no referral of any of these sorts of procedures to the Procedure Committee, which is the appropriate place for it to be dealt with. I might just respond to the contention, the concern that Dr Mansfield raised, with the Greens saying sometimes they do not have enough speakers on something and they run out of time. This was the case with the motion that was moved last sitting week in regard to abortion. That was a stunt just to wedge the government, so again, if they really cared about this what they could have actually done is manage their speaking time within the allocated time and we could have had a vote. But they chose not to, so that is a matter for them. But putting it onto the government to say, ‘We want to gag the government and make this a problem for the government,’ just speaks to the fact that you are really about punishing government. You are ignoring convention, ignoring proper process and wanting to gag the government.

It is about the unintended consequences, and I want it to be taken note of that I am standing here today calling this out because the unintended consequences are very clear. You have given no consideration to the staff. You have not referred this to the Procedure Committee. You have taken no steps of your own volition to manage your speaking time within the slots that you have been allocated, but you want to plunge this chamber into chaos and more late-night sittings. You have failed to consult the government on this approach. We provided a sensible and reasonable alternative, which was ‘Let’s refer this to the Procedure Committee first.’ Mr Davis in his contribution, which I listened to very, very closely, said, ‘We’re happy to work with government, but only after we’ve got this motion moved through the chamber’ – because you want to punish us. You want to punish us. There has been no opportunity to talk about this.

What we know on this side of the chamber as well is that crossbenchers like to use their adjournments and other things they move in this house as great social media opportunities, where they spread disinformation, they put it online and we do not have the opportunity to respond to it. Dr Mansfield said, ‘We have no opportunities to talk about things.’ Well, there are constituency questions. There are adjournments. You have the opportunity to move motions. There is plenty of opportunity for you to do those things. Every day you get an opportunity to do those things.

So, again, we predict that there will be unintended consequences with this approach, and I have called a couple of them out now. I call out the lack of willingness on the part of Mr Davis and those opposite to recognise and take account of longstanding convention, which is to not spring something on the government or any party in this chamber by surprise. It does not matter about convention. He has no interest in honouring those conventions. It is very disappointing from you, Mr Davis, because you have been here for a long time, a very long time, and you should know better. But, again, this is all designed to gag the government.

The proper way to handle this is to go to the Procedure Committee first, but there has been no attempt to have this put to the Procedure Committee, which is the proper way to handle it. It is a significant change to this sitting day. As I said, there is no dinner break. Why didn't you propose that there be a dinner break, Mr Davis? Because you have not considered it. You have stuffed it up. Perhaps if this had been referred to the Procedure Committee, we could have talked about that. That is the proper way to handle significant changes – and it is a significant change – to a sitting day. If the government proposed a major change to Tuesdays and Thursdays and sought to ram it through this chamber, the chamber would be, rightfully, outraged. But you have got the crossbench who want to support you, because you have probably done a deal with the crossbenchers on this as well. This is all about how you can maximise and get the most leverage out of something like this.

You have failed to consider the staff. Shame on you and shame on the crossbench too. I look forward to the union getting involved in this, and I hope they do. I hope we have WorkCover inspectors turning up, because the fact is you are plunging these people into a situation where they are not going to get a break, so well done. Again, this is a failure to consider all of the ramifications. Had we had a discussion in the Procedure Committee, we could have pointed this out. When this goes through I am going to take note of all the times that we sit late on a Wednesday and the fact that we have no dinner break and who is here in the chamber. I hope that the union takes note of it too – perhaps I might even let the union know that information – because we need to make sure that workers rights are protected. But you have no interest in that – you have no interest in that at all – and neither do the crossbench. Shame on the crossbench and shame on the opposition for doing this. It is very disappointing indeed. The government proposed a sensible alternative – to have this discussed in the Procedure Committee – but, again, it was rejected.

Just a comment on documents motions generally: our government consistently upholds its obligation to the Parliament to provide responses to motions whenever they are passed. We do not oppose documents motions really ever, and we consistently provide documents. The thing that you do not like is that they are not provided in the manner you see fit. You are moving so many documents motions that all our departments are consistently bogged down with these requests for information, but you think it is not fast enough. The problem is that you are creating a ridiculous workload for our hardworking public servants for them to be able to comply with these motions, but you are not interested in that. You are not interested in the mechanics of it.

It is an accepted principle that in some circumstances a government may withhold documents when disclosure would be contrary to the public interest. The basis for withholding documents is called executive privilege. The government receives legal advice, including from the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, to inform its decisions to claim executive privilege. It is not something we just make up. We do that based on advice. Based on that advice either we will claim privilege or we will not, but we generally provide documents. That is why we do not oppose documents motions. Matters that the government considers include whether documents would reveal directly or indirectly the deliberative processes of cabinet, would reveal high-level confidential deliberative processes of executive government or would otherwise generally jeopardise the necessary relationship of trust and confidence. I could go on about that. Nevertheless, those opposite do not want to hear it. Again I will point out that there are two opposition members sitting on the benches on their day. This is opposition business day, and there are two members of their whole bench here. Wow. That speaks volumes about the seriousness with which they consider this.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** They do not even want to make a quorum. We could have a lot of fun with that. We normally would support documents motions, but again here we are, we have got another Liberal member here in the chamber – the government will be opposing this motion for all the reasons that I just mentioned.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:46): Acting President Galea, I always notice the jeers across the chamber are a lot quieter when you are in the chair, so it is good to be able to speak. I thank Mr Davis for putting forward this motion that specifically deals with non-government business day. All of a sudden we have got the government very interested in non-government business day, it being for the opposition and the crossbench to air grievances, seek documents, form debates, introduce bills, present petitions and debate petitions. We have seen it evolve over time. Mr Limbrick was quite instrumental in introducing our petition debates in this chamber and has been a key part of that. Sessional orders are not meant to be a static piece. They evolve over time, and one of the issues that we have had for a long time, and I know the crossbench has had for a long time, is the interference with non-government business day running up to the last 90-minute slot to prevent a vote and truncate our time on our day in order to not get to a vote. These have been very well crafted by all of the crossbench, actually, in consultation –

**Ryan Batchelor:** Are you going to spread the blame around for when they –

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** no – and there may have been a number of other options, but what we do on this side of the chamber is consult with our colleagues, particularly our crossbench colleagues, in regard to sessional orders. We are open to a mature discussion about sessional orders. I understand Ms Symes has a change on the notice paper to try to limit the amount of time we can have for adjournment debates in this chamber. I am not sure that we could agree to that, but we are happy to have the discussion, and we are happy to have a discussion about what broader changes are needed that we could negotiate broad support for to make this Parliament work best for everyone.

What Mr Davis has proposed is a simple change – at 5:15 pm or after 300 minutes of general business has elapsed, whichever is later – in order to get the full three 90-minute debating slots, in order to fit the short-form documents motions in and in order to fit in everything that we need to do, including notices of motion, members statements, question time, constituency questions and petition debates, on a Wednesday to make this Parliament and to make this chamber work for everyone. As I have stated, many in the non-government parties feel that the non-government business day is interfered with in order to not get to a vote on the motion of certain members on our third motion. It has happened to us, but it has also happened to many of my crossbench colleagues – Mr Limbrick and the Greens as well – where we have not been able to get to a vote. The government has filled out their speaking list on numerous occasions.

**Lee Tarlamis:** When? When did it happen?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** On numerous occasions.

**Lee Tarlamis:** When? Name them.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** One was just last week. One happened to Mr Limbrick. It has happened to us before. So it is important on a non-government day – and we have facilitated it on government days, even – taking people off speaking lists and negotiating with the government to finish at appropriate times and things like that. All we want is to be treated reasonably. It is not a huge change to the standing orders.

The way that the government members are carrying on it is like it is some massive, enormous change to the standing orders. It is a minuscule change to the standing orders, and I am not quite sure why the government is so upset about it. It is dumbfounding to me that they would be so upset with such a small change. If we had come in here and brought wideranging changes to sessional orders on

non-government and government days, then sure, you would have every right to be upset. Something like that would definitely need to be discussed at the Procedure Committee, and we are very open to having future discussions at the Procedure Committee, but motions like this, which are very narrow, pertain to non-government business and have the support of the non-government members of this chamber, do not require that amount of time to be taken up by the Procedure Committee.

There is an important democratic principle here. It is not just the government that is elected to this Parliament. The people of Victoria, rightly or wrongly, have chosen that every single person in this Parliament be here – they have – including the minor parties and including non-government members. The people of Victoria have chosen this Parliament. Therefore those parties that they elect or the individuals that they elect should have the opportunity to be heard. That is the democratic principle at stake here, and when we deny members votes on particular issues and try to deny them the opportunity to get to a vote, that is a problem, because they have earned that spot to have a debate, to have a vote on a particular issue and to have the right to have that vote unencumbered by government interference.

I will leave it at that. This is an important democratic principle. The change is to non-government business days, and once again it is a very narrow change. I am shocked and surprised. The last time we changed sessional orders we had a whole bunch of members on the other side of the chamber with their talking points, reading about the wrong change to the sessional orders, so thankfully they have at least got this one right. That was one of the funniest days I have had in this Parliament, watching speaker after speaker read the same points on the wrong motion. They seem to have gotten a bit more cluey, I think. At least they are on the right track. This is a very narrow motion about non-government business days, and I think it is worthy of the support of the entire chamber.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:54): I also rise to speak on this motion, which seeks a change to the sessional orders in order to fix a problem. The problem that we have is that we have a fixed time when we go to statements on reports, and yet the amount of time that can be taken up before that is variable. Occasionally what happens is that we run out of time and the person who is unfortunate to have the last general business slot of the day gets cut short. Mr Mulholland referred to me, and I had one of my slots cut short due to this occurrence. I will note, though, that the Government Whip did facilitate a vote, so it did get to a vote. Nevertheless, there were potentially members – it could have been members of the government – that may have wanted to speak on that motion that were not able to, because of this problem.

The solution proposed is, instead of having statements and reports start at a fixed time, to have a variable time. I do take note of Ms Terpstra's comments about Parliament running too late, and I do actually sympathise with that. We should not be placing undue demands on Parliament staff. That is why I had discussions with the government, and I note that Ms Symes has a motion on the notice paper to reduce the length of adjournment matters from 3 minutes to 2 minutes. I would happily support that. I think that is fine. I think that we should be able to get our requests out in 2 minutes, and I also note that the option is still available to email them if you have something more lengthy that you might want to quote from. I would actually support that, and I am also very open to discussions about changing times on other things to manage this better. Nonetheless, this is a solution proposed to a problem. The government said that this might have other unintended consequences. In order to look at that, I am also quite open to and happy with having the Procedure Committee look at this and see if there are problems and come back to the chamber. I think that that would be a sensible thing to do.

There are many other issues that we have discussed around the sessional orders and how they operate. I thank the government for ongoing discussions about documents motions, for example, and how we might better manage that. The feedback that I have had from the government is that the scope of documents motions is not variable. The government does not have the option of varying scope. Building in a process to allow negotiation by consent with the mover of the motion to narrow the scope of documents motions I think is a very sensible thing, and I am very happy to work with government on fixing the sessional orders to allow that to happen. I think that one of the existing unintended consequences of documents motions is that because many movers of motions do not get anything back



they probably do not target their request as well as they might otherwise if they did expect that the government might give them something. They sort of think, 'Well, the government's not going to give me anything anyway. I might as well cast a wide net.' I am guilty of that sort of thinking. If I thought it far more likely that the government would give me a response, I would probably pay a lot more attention to exactly what I was asking and try to make sure I was not asking for things that are onerous for departments to provide.

Nonetheless, I think that this is not a huge change. Like I said, I am happy to work with the government, the crossbench and the opposition to try and manage it so that this is not even necessary when it comes up, but I am also happy for the Procedure Committee to look at this. I do think that especially for crossbenchers from minor parties, when you only have two general business slots per year of 90 minutes each and they get cut because you unfortunately end up with the last slot of the day, it is a bit rough. I did not complain about it when it happened to me at the time, because basically I just wanted to get it to a vote, but maybe there were people that wanted to speak on a motion that did not get an opportunity to, because of the current standing orders. With that in mind, I will be supporting what is being proposed by the opposition here. That said, I want it on the record that I am very open to looking at ways to make the day more efficient, to manage the workload of Parliament staff and also to make some of the other sessional orders more efficient. It is unfortunate that we could not come up with a solution that everyone agreed on this time, but certainly I am open to that and I would support Minister Syme's suggestion to shorten adjournments to 2 minutes.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (10:59): Well, what a wideranging opportunity we have had today to talk to the discussions that people bring on a Wednesday which are of significant and often very personal relevance to people who stand up to make contributions only to find that the time is not sufficient for them to do so. It seems that on the one hand we are prepared to countenance motions during the rest of the week and contributions during the rest of the week that go to the same sort of subject matter, but on a Wednesday debate and discussion is not able to continue in a way that is sufficiently fulsome to ensure that the very issues that bring us here are able to be ventilated and we are able to do the work that we are here to do. I want to make reference to a particular example of that. Last sitting week we had a motion on reproductive rights and bodily autonomy. I was, I think, only a couple of minutes into my contribution hearing incessant interjections from people about allegations of filibustering and of wasting time. To my mind this speaks to the very nature and the very rationale and the motivation that sits under this particular motion here today, because to have calls coming from around the chamber that I ought not be in position to make a contribution on bodily autonomy, on reproductive rights or on being able to access abortion and termination services, is something that says issues should be canvassed and dealt with extensively except for when it is not convenient to the business of the chamber.

In rising to oppose the motion today put by Mr Davis, I want to put on the record just how unfortunate and, frankly, really disappointing it was to receive notice of a motion seeking to amend the sessional orders with one day's notice. This is something which the opposition constantly take issue with, and yet when they propose the same sort of timeframes all of a sudden it is acceptable in the interest of expediency for this chamber. No consultation was taken on the proposal that is being put forward today, and Mr Davis, back in the Leader of the Opposition's office in this place once more, should know that the proper way to bring forward a proposal like this is via the Procedure Committee. Mr Davis, this is not your first rodeo. That is perhaps something that others may despair about, but we are where we are. It is a committee that the Leader of the Government in this place, Minister Symes, and you, Mr Davis, as Leader of the Opposition, are members of.

The purpose of the committee, just for avoidance of any doubt in the course of this conversation, is as follows:

The Committee considers any matter regarding the practices and procedures of the Legislative Council and makes recommendations for change.

Let us just go through some data, because data is important for the purpose of this conversation. The Procedure Committee met in the last Parliament at least 16 times. In this Parliament the committee has only met four times and it has not produced a report. I note also that the Leader of the Greens in this place is not a member of the Procedure Committee. Is that correct? Yes, it is. To that end, these are mechanisms which exist for the very purpose of addressing the issues that we are here today discussing. Mr Davis has come here and in fact today talked about the importance of the Procedure Committee in being able to address these very issues. Mr Davis talked in his contribution about the importance of enabling the Procedure Committee to deal with matters just like this. But having a bet each way, which appears to be Mr Davis's political form throughout his 960-year parliamentary career, he has indeed refused to acknowledge that the Procedure Committee ought to properly be given an opportunity to do the work of this motion.

If you were to browse, Mr Davis, the reports of the committee produced in the previous Parliament, you would actually find a report from 2022 reviewing the standing orders and their operation. That was about following proper process. To that end I note, and this was a contribution made by Mr Limbrick identifying a motion that has been on the notice paper for a significant period of time around the duration of adjournments, having been here in the chamber for up to 20 adjournments – actually it is usually between 17 and 20 adjournment matters each evening – that members, including members of the crossbench, frequently make their contribution for the purpose of a reel or a quick shout-out on social media and then disappear. They are not there for the answers that they seek even where the minister on duty has carriage for the portfolios upon which they are seeking an action.

I would say to that, 'Let's use parliamentary time in a way that serves the purpose for which it was developed in the first place.' That is the purpose by which adjournments can be put and tabled in writing. That is the purpose by which adjournments can be put in the chamber and answers can be sought where the relevant minister is on duty. I can count now on, I suspect, not even two hands the number of times that members in this place have put adjournments and not then just disappeared. If you were actually serious about using parliamentary process for the purpose for which it was intended, you would at the very least stick around. What an indictment on those opposite – to have taken cheap deals to push through changes themselves, to the detriment of the Parliament.

There are ongoing issues relating to the third general business slot not always getting to a vote. We are not opposed in principle to the motion brought by Mr Davis here today, seeking to amend a sessional order to enable that third slot to receive a vote if required. Again, I want to speak to that third slot, being something that I was in the middle of making a contribution on – bodily autonomy, the right to termination and abortion in Victoria. I did not get to complete my speech, and indeed I was accused of filibustering on that particular issue, an issue which was pressed as being so important that it warrants inclusion in the constitution and yet this place did not enable a contribution to be made at the same time that a vote was being pressed, thereby seeking to have my contribution cut short. I am concerned that the proposed fix has been rushed, particularly when we look at Mr Davis's own contribution, with reports of numerous iterations floating around the opposition and the crossbench inboxes – notwithstanding the fact that it was given a period of 24 hours before it was put to government, Mr Davis. There has been no ability to examine potential ramifications of the changes proposed, and that is really relevant given arguably we have arrived at this issue today after previous changes were rushed through. So it is either rushing or it is taking our time – it is doing work without cutting corners or it is doing work for the sake of political expediency and a quick stunt.

We have concerns around the consequences of the change, particularly if it leads to an extension of the sitting day, which it will, and how this will impact parliamentary staff – the clerks, the table officers, chamber support staff: no dinner suspension on Wednesdays. Again, this is not for the purpose of us sitting around a table in an antiquated fashion enjoying a buffet. This is actually about staff being able to have a break. This is about making sure that the business of this chamber and the business of this Parliament as a workplace appropriately balances the rights and the entitlements of people who work here. This is about making sure that when and as we move into committee work –

and we note the requirement for the chamber to continue until such time as committees have the opportunity to sit and to hear evidence in hearings. Anybody in this place who is part of a committee, with one of the many, many inquiries that are being undertaken at this point in time, will know the impost and the workload associated with heading directly from a day of business in this chamber into hearings – not upon ourselves, because we have a seven-day-a-week job, but upon the people who need to be there for the purpose of secretariat work, Hansard work and the business of the house, including the attendants, the staff and security. This is not an exercise that occurs in isolation in a way that enables us to sit in a vacuum of antiquity. This is a huge workplace, and again, cavalier attempts to undermine this process and run roughshod over the broader considerations of this place as it stands as a Parliament, as a whole, are not only ill-considered and they are not only being done for the purpose of a cheap stunt, but they are frankly irresponsible.

It was the intention of the Leader of the Government to move an amendment seeking referral of the motion to the Procedure Committee and a proposed report back to this place on 20 March, noting the committee's purpose to provide recommendations for the house. It was the leader's intention to do that in consultation with every member of the crossbench as part of this process. But given the lack of support around this and the way in which the complete lack of time has been countenanced for political purposes, the government and the leader have chosen not to do this.

I have mentioned already the notice of motion that the Leader of the Government has had on the notice paper since November 2023. It is actually really embarrassing that the adjournment process is taken in such a cavalier fashion for the purpose of external social media related matters. Unlike those opposite and those from the crossbench who have supported this utter shemozzle, we will consult first, and therefore we cannot support this motion.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:09): It has been an interesting debate today; it says a lot of things. But I think what this morning's motion says to me more than anything else is that at a time when there are so many pressing matters of public policy – whether it is the cost-of-living issues our communities face, whether it is our education system, whether it is how we improve health care, whether it is how we improve our community or whether it is what we can do to strengthen the state's economy and help to create jobs – the Liberal Party thinks that the most important thing that we in this chamber could be talking about on a day when they get to set the agenda is ourselves. The most important thing that the Liberal Party think should occupy the time that they have complete control over in this chamber today – Wednesday, a non-government business day – and the first thing they want to talk about is changes to the sessional orders. I think it says a lot about the priorities of the Liberal Party – maybe it is about the priorities of the new Leader of the Opposition – that what matters to them most is what goes on within these four walls and what dictates what we do on a Wednesday.

The government responds to the priorities that are set on Wednesday. We do not determine the issues that come before us. It is our obligation to respond to the debates that are put forward. But the fundamental point that I want to make at the start of this debate is I think it tells you everything you need to know about where the Liberal Party are today when they think the most important thing that we can be talking about today – the one issue, the first issue – and the most important issue of general business they can think about today is the sessional orders. Their priorities are all wrong.

I want to come now to a few things that have been said in the context of this debate to justify what is occurring here today. We are here making these changes to these sessional orders – the second time we have made changes to the sessional orders in the life of this Parliament – because the last time changes were made to the sessional orders Mr Davis made a mistake.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Shocked as you may be, Minister Shing, to hear that about something that Mr Davis brought into this chamber, with all of the fanfare and the sense of his own import, he brought in a series of changes to the sessional orders in November 2023 to introduce short-form document

motions. At the time we said a number of things, one of which was that the very short speaking times would in fact disenfranchise members of this place who wanted to speak on those motions, and that has been borne out time and time again. The other point that we made at the time was that it would have consequences for the shape of the rest of the day and that by making up these sessional order changes, bringing them to the chamber without any consultation, doing a quick deal with the crossbench and telling them it was all going to be okay, in the end the members of the crossbench would be the ones that would lose out because of Mr Davis's concoction of new sessional orders. That was because of the operation of the standing orders and because when you add time at the start of the day, you lose time at the end of the day, so the third slot of general business was at risk of not being concluded because of the changes that Mr Davis proposed to the sessional orders – not the government's changes, but Mr Davis's changes. We pointed it out. They said they were going to manage it; somehow it was going to be managed.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** 'Leave it to us. We'll sort it out. We created the problem, we'll fix it.' Well, they did not.

What has troubled me in the course of the debate today is the blame that others in the opposition and on the crossbench are seeking to lay at the feet of others for mistakes that they made. We heard it from Mr Davis, who said that it is not the sessional orders that he introduced and got the crossbench to agree to that have caused the problem but that the problem is that what the government is doing is filibustering debate. Dr Mansfield in her contribution said that part of the problem on a Wednesday was that there were too many government speakers who wanted to speak – that it is just not good enough that there are too many members of the government who want to make contributions on matters raised by non-government members.

**Renee Heath:** On a point of order, Acting President, Dr Mansfield is not in the room, but he is verballing her and I would ask him not to do that.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** There is no point of order.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Mr Mulholland accused government members of interfering – of creating interference in the course of debate. Then, in an audacious pivot in his contribution, he went on to talk about important democratic principles. Well, Mr Mulholland, Dr Mansfield, Mr Davis, we think that a pretty fundamental democratic principle is the right of members of this place to make contributions on matters of importance – not that we decide on a Wednesday, because we do not decide. The government does not decide what topics of debate are on a Wednesday. We respond. They set the agenda and we respond, and now they have got the temerity to stand up and complain that government members want to make a contribution on those topics. They have the temerity to suggest that because we are passionate representatives of our local community – engaged members of this legislature – elected by the people to be one of their voices, somehow we should curtail our contributions to this place because they do not like the timing. I think that speaks volumes about the contempt they are showing to this chamber, the contempt that is being shown by the way that sessional orders are being introduced without broad consultation.

Sessional orders today are being introduced to fix a problem that was of their own creation by adding short-form documents motions at the start of the day, which then pushed back business throughout the rest of the day. The sessional orders introduced by Mr Davis say there can be two short docs motions of 20 minutes apiece plus some divisions, so you have got about 50 minutes of extra time. Then we have introduction of private members bills – often they are introduced and, as there should be able to be, there is extra time there. We have now got petitions qualifying for debate; that extends further time in the day, and there is an opportunity for government business should it be required. So the addition of all of this time means that Wednesdays are growing by an extra hour or an extra 1 hour and 50 minutes, plus any government business time that is being used.

Other speakers in the course of the debate have talked about the consequences and the impacts of that time on this chamber and on the people who support us to be here, and the fact that by not having a broad consultation many of those issues have been ignored. What we have consistently said and what the minister said in her contribution about the way that the government thinks these matters should be resolved is that they should be considered by the Procedure Committee before we move the motions, before we debate the motions and before we proceed with the motions. There may well be some unintended consequences of this change to sessional orders as moved by Mr Davis, because there were last time. We have seen a pattern of behaviour here where someone does something, cocks it up, tries to fix it and moves on. That is what we are witnessing here today. I come back to the point I made at the start: what it shows us is a Liberal Party with exactly the wrong priorities, and I think that is the saddest indictment of all in today's debate.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:19): I also rise to speak on the latest concoction by Mr Davis that he has put before this chamber today, and in doing so I think it bears repeating the argument made by Mr Batchelor that indeed we have three general business slots today and the Liberal Party have been given all three slots today courtesy of Mr Bourman, and yet this is the number one item that they wish to raise. This is what they think Victorians care about. It is frankly astonishing, it is frankly tone-deaf and it speaks to a Liberal Party that is as inept as ever and that is as disconnected from the concerns of Victorians as ever.

It has been canvassed by others, but it really is worth going into the absolute shameless lack of consultation that occurred on this motion. Normally these things are discussed and they are given notice. In fact if you look at the notice paper you will see the motion from the government which is talking about reforming the adjournment for the reasons that Minister Shing went through. That has been on the notice paper since November 2023, and there have been many conversations – I have been part of some of them – with members, with those opposite and with the crossbench to ensure that we can get all views and come to a solution that is workable. That has not happened here. At 4:54 on a Monday afternoon, 6 minutes before the government business meeting, this got brought to our attention.

**Lee Tarlamis** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: Two minutes before; I will take that correction, Mr Tarlamis. Two minutes before the government business meeting for the week is when this came to our attention. Either that is grossly incompetent, Mr Davis, or it speaks to a surreptitious, sneaky attempt to cause havoc and to punish the government as others have said. Either you are doing this as a deliberate ploy as a political attack or you are just plain incompetent. I do not know which it is. Perhaps it could be a bit from column A, perhaps it could be a bit from column B, but 2 minutes before the business meeting is not how we operate in this place. We on this side have always tried to be up-front with crossbench members and with opposition members about our plans for the week. Clearly what we are being told today by those opposite and indeed by the crossbench if they are supporting this is that that is not what they want and that is not what they expect from the government either. Because if that is what they will accept from the Liberal Party, that says a great deal about what they are prepared to accept in this place.

It is very disappointing because we are the chamber of review, the chamber of generally good-mannered congeniality with each other. We do get things done. We are much less tribal than the other place. But if that is the approach that the bumbling Mr Davis wishes to take after his recrudescing return to the leadership, then that will be very disappointing indeed – all the more disappointing because we have had this debate before when Mr Davis previously tried to change the sessional orders and he cocked it up. He completely cocked it up. We said that this would be an issue. We warned about the potential issues of this. We said this should be going to the Procedure Committee, but he persevered and the opposition and the crossbench pushed it through and they cocked it up. They assured us though that, 'No, no, no, any issues with that that third slot of the day we will work out. We will come to an arrangement.' In fact Dr Ratnam, the former leader of the Greens, made that assurance

to us as well. Clearly her word is just as worthless as Mr Davis's, because we have this situation here today where it has become an issue.

It is quite extraordinary for those that made this decision, that pushed this previous sessional order change through despite the fact that we warned you about all the things could go wrong and all the unforeseen things that could go wrong without putting it through a Procedure Committee, to come in here today and with an apparent straight face blame us again for apparently wasting their time by actually making a democratic contribution in this place. That, Dr Heath, is gaslighting. Ruining it, cocking it up and then blaming the government is gaslighting in its purest form.

I will stick on that point, because it is worth noting that on many occasions, despite those assurances being made by Mr Davis, Ms Crozier and Dr Ratnam, we have seen this come up as an issue time and time and time again. The government has repeatedly and regularly done its best to accommodate that and bring things to a vote. That does not mean that we are going to hold our members back from speaking on issues that are very important to them. Last week is a perfect case in point on that. I would not dream of telling any member in this place – any woman in this place – that they did not have the right to speak on such an important topic as reproductive rights. But that is what is being implied by other members in this place today. That is what is being implied by the opposition and the crossbench, that our members should not have that right, and that is frankly disgraceful. Despite that, where we can, we have regularly yielded and weighed things, made our changes to our list to enable third slots to go to a vote.

But we have this situation again. We have Mr Davis, who cocked it up the first time, now coming before us today with a solution that is slapdash, 2 minutes before the business meeting. Two minutes before the business meeting is no consultation at all, so we have no confidence that this will not completely cock it up again – no confidence whatsoever. What we have tried to say to those opposite, to crossbench members, is 'Let's do this properly. You've made this. You've bugged it up. Let's put it to the Procedure Committee,' which is what it is there for. Let the Procedure Committee do its job, fix the issue and come back with a proposal within a short space of time – I understand Minister Shing was saying 20 March. Let us come back to the chamber with a proposal that is workable for everyone, because the government from the outset has always supported the principle of all three non-government business slots being given their full 90 minutes. We have said so. We said so in the previous debate when Mr Davis cocked it up. But instead of listening to that, instead of saying, 'Yes, let's go to the Procedure Committee,' what we are told today is, 'Nah, nah, nah. We will just push it through anyway and then we'll go to the Procedure Committee.' So members in this place, including Dr Mansfield, are admitting that it is not perfect, it is not right – 'We're going to cock it up again, probably, but we'll support it.' That is literally the most ridiculous concept. It is basically the same as the American attitude of 'shoot first and ask questions later'. It is the most ridiculous way to go about it, and it undermines the whole point and purpose of having a Procedure Committee in the first place.

One of the many other things that the Procedure Committee would be able to look at is to properly have consultation as well from the parliamentary staff, as other speakers have already spoken about. That might not be a high concern for other members in this place, but it is for those on this side of the chamber. Whether it is working people in the retail stores, in the construction sites, in the hospitals or in the Parliament, working Victorians deserve safe and fair conditions at work. Again, it does not matter for our purposes as MPs whether we are here till 4 pm or whether we are here till 2 am. But for the staff that can be a major consequential change, and that has been completely disregarded. I doubt that has even crossed Mr Davis's mind once. I am not happy for the staff in this place to have their terms and conditions set by the capricious whims of a man who cannot even get his figures correct, who cannot even talk to people before he brings a motion in or give more than 2 minutes notice. That is not the example that I want to be following in this place.

The principle of the third slot going to its full time is very important – it should do so, and we have always said that. More often than not, including for Mr Limbrick and for others, we have supported that and we have changed things around, including holding back our speakers, in order to facilitate

that. That should never mean, though, that we should be compelled – held at gunpoint, if you will – to pull our speakers back on very important topics, which, as Minister Shing so well articulated, occurred last week. That should never be the case, and that is exactly why this should have gone to the Procedure Committee in the first place.

We have seen the absolute bumbling mess of an opposition continue into now its third year in this term of the Parliament, still completely incapable of governing itself. Clearly the new Leader of the Opposition Mr Battin's number one priority is making more changes to the upper house sessional orders. It is not about Victorians. It is not about those people working in the stores, on the construction sites, in the hospitals. It is not about how we best support Victorian students, how we best upgrade our outer suburban infrastructure – none of that. It is about navel-gazing once again, because that is all that side knows how to do. If they are not knifing each other, they are looking at themselves in the mirror and talking about how they can change things in this place, but they are not committed to changing things for Victoria, and that goes to the absolute heart of what we have before us today from those members opposite. This is a complete trainwreck of an opposition, led by a bumbling shadow minister over there who, again, cannot even be bothered to pick up the phone more than 2 minutes before a meeting. We will not be supporting this motion.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:30): Well, well, well, Mr Davis has come into his new role and is certainly trying to make his mark, isn't he? But as per usual, Fly Davis is on the fly, with no consideration and no consultation, and here we have yet another motion which is ill conceived, ill thought through and of course completely lacking logic and completely lacking consultation.

Mr Davis is someone who speaks so often about convention, about this place and about grand history. But in fact consider that we have a Procedure Committee that is there and its very purpose is to have a consultative, democratic process where changes like these can be considered in their full. Of all people who stand up and espouse the sort of language that he does, I would have thought that Mr Davis would have wanted to go to the appropriate committee for this to have its due process and for there to be the conversations and the consultation that should occur when we are talking about how our parliamentary process will run. What does not surprise me in what Mr Davis has done is him not having in his highest priorities, or the Liberal Party not having in their highest priorities, what is happening outside in the real lives of Victorians. The Liberal Party are not focused on Victorians, nor have they ever been.

It is interesting. I was just having a conversation this morning about past premiers. A premier had been quoted as making a comment around a particular piece of infrastructure in the media. I was going through the past premiers, and I was like, 'Oh, it wasn't any of these.' I actually forgot that Dolittle and Nap Time had had their stints. Victorians forget that because they did nothing during those four years. They were ill equipped for government, as they are ill equipped now. This is why we see when we come to this place that we are not debating cost-of-living measures – whether that be getting kids to kinder, getting kids into education, getting parents back into the workforce, relieving costs for families and for parents or ensuring kids have the things they need, whether that is uniforms, books or whatever it might be – so people can get out and get on with their lives. There is a whole variety of things that this government has done to make people's lives easier, to make people's lives better, to make life more affordable and to make life more livable. It has not been, and nor will it ever be – as long as they hold the values that we have seen in recent decades in the Liberal Party – in their DNA to go away and put their time into improving the lives of Victorians.

This is why we are here on this motion, a motion that actually stems from a place of their own making. An incredible part of this is that we are coming back to November 2023. I know Mr Davis is not good on detail; we saw before the last election that details on just a minor thing, like their own policy costings, seemed to evade him and seep out of his mind. The attention to detail is not there. This is just another example of why the Liberal Party are not fit to govern in the state of Victoria. They are absolutely not fit. The fact that we are coming back to this conversation after they had a go at it in November 2023, the fact that it is being rushed through and is not going to the appropriate committee

and the fact that it was put forward 2 minutes before a meeting was to occur this week is just breathtaking.

A little bit of advice to those opposite: you might like to give a bit more attention to what is going on in the lives of Victorians out there. When you talk to families who have received the \$400 school saving bonus this year, it has made a real tangible difference in people's lives – whether that is with uniforms, whether that is with excursions or whether that is with textbooks – and in making sure that our kids can get to school and get a world-class education. Things have been put in over the years, like the school breakfast program, that make sure that when our kids do get to school they are equipped to start the day on an equal footing and are equipped to start the day in a way where they can learn to their maximum and go on to have the most productive lives for themselves, for their families and for their local communities and so in the future this state can be productive and generate as much productive activity as possible.

Things like the V/Line fairer fare are ensuring that regional and rural Victorians get the same access to public transport travel as metropolitan Melburnians do. We know that was not the Liberal plan going into the 2022 election, but I am proud it was the Labor plan. I am proud that when we are talking about skills shortages we are supporting people getting into apprenticeships and people getting into traineeships as they go through those pathways. We are going to have a generation go through a pathway of three- and four-year-old kinder and then into world-class infrastructure in the education system with our primary schools and secondary colleges. For those that want to go on and do a traineeship or an apprenticeship they can go into our TAFE system, a system that we have invested in since the Liberals went and cut it to shreds. They can go in there, and for the courses where we know we need them most they can get fee-free TAFE and go on and earn money in jobs that are in demand and, as I said before, go and make an incredibly productive contribution to our state. But what is more, they can be in jobs where they can set their own lives up, where people can get on with living and they can support their families, support their local communities and make a real contribution to the thriving state that is Victoria – a state we can all be absolutely proud of. And when they are in those apprenticeships, there is free rego. How good is that for our young apprentices who are doing the work and training up to get skills?

We know those opposite do not believe in training a pipeline of workers up. As we have seen whenever they have been in government, there have been layoffs and cuts and they have got rid of the pipeline for the workforce that sees people enter, build their skill level and be able to deliver a high-quality skill level in whatever profession it may be, which is so important to an economy that is highly productive. I will not go into a whole lot of different things about productivity, but when you talk about level crossing removal and when you talk about ensuring that people in our city are getting from A to B, people are getting the skill sets and parents are getting back into the workforce, all of that is ensuring the productivity of our state. The fair fuel plan to make sure that people can see where they can get the cheapest fuel is supporting people to get from A to B in the most economically beneficial way possible.

It is all this that is important, and it all starts from a set of collective values of wanting to see the best outcomes for Victorians. When that is your starting point, you come together – as we do on this side – as a party and collectively as a team with your colleagues and you map it out: how are we going to continuously improve the quality of life for Victorians so that every day Victorians can get out and contribute and continue to see our state being an incredible place to live? As I have demonstrated just briefly, it starts from the start of people's lives and goes all the way through, and it is about ensuring that that quality, that care and those services are there to support people. It does not matter whether it is in child care or in aged care, the education is there and the health system is there to support people's physical health and people's mental health and their ability to engage in their local community and their ability to live their life to the absolute fullest. When that is at the heart of planning and when that is at the heart of policy creation and development, that is what drives incredible outcomes for a state. It is not waking up one morning and, with a lack of consultation, coming in and throwing something on the floor 2 minutes before a meeting starts and Mr Davis and the Liberals saying, 'Do you know



what? We stuffed up what we did in November 2023; we're going to have another go on the fly.' Mr Davis, I do not support this motion.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:40): This is an important motion, a motion that brings forward a sensible change to the sessional orders which will enable the chamber to work more efficiently and effectively and will enable the crossbench and the opposition to ensure that our motions are able to be debated in the way that is intended. As I have indicated, we are prepared after the motion is passed to spend some time at Procedure Committee working our way through a number of these points that have been raised by others in the chamber. The Leader of the Government has raised points around the adjournments. I certainly have matters around the return of documents that I would like to discuss at Procedure Committee. So I think there is an important role for Procedure Committee. Ms Shing pointed to a large number of Procedure Committee meetings in the last cycle, and that is true – there were. I am not against having Procedure Committee meetings. We have opportunities to talk about a wide range of matters, and I think at the behest of the President the committee could be convened to discuss a number of those issues that people in the chamber, crossbench included, wish to discuss. This is an important point that we want to see dealt with. I also just want to make one other point here: never forget –

**Michael Galea**: On a point of order, President, even though it is for his own members, I would call on Mr Davis not to point at other members in the chamber, please.

**The PRESIDENT**: That is not a point of order.

**David DAVIS**: The point that is salient here is that the government in recent weeks has used occasions to filibuster in a number of ways.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS**: No, I was about to explain something very important. The large number of –

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT**: Order! There is too much noise. Mr Davis without any assistance.

**David DAVIS**: I do think that last week there were significant attempts by the government to push out an agenda with the putting on of notices of motion, pushing to all of those points. We know what occurred. But let us look at this by looking to the future. Let us make the change – a sensible change that will guarantee every crossbencher gets their opportunity when it is required. It will guarantee that in a sensible way. The focus is to aim at 5:15 each Wednesday so that we can finish at a sensible time. That opportunity will be there, and we will certainly be working with the crossbench and the government to achieve that. Again, this is a very modest change. The broader changes that people might make we are happy to have discussions about in good faith at Procedure Committee, and it is up to the President to draw that point. But let us make this sensible change today, which will protect non-government business, protect the crossbench and protect the opposition.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (24)*: Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (14)*: Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion agreed to.**

**Health services**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:50): I move:

That this house:

- (1) condemns the Allan Labor government for failing to manage Victoria's health system, including the amalgamation of health services across Victoria, which will lead to a loss of frontline jobs, services and local community voice, and centralised decision-making;
- (2) notes:
  - (a) the lack of community consultation by the Allan Labor government on their plans to amalgamate health services and create local health service networks, which has led to ongoing uncertainty for local communities, staff and hospital management;
  - (b) that no additional funding has been provided to establish the networks;
- (3) further notes:
  - (a) the closure of critical healthcare services, as a result of budget cuts, leaving vulnerable Victorians without the support and management they deserve and need;
  - (b) that hospitals across the state are running massive deficits in excess of \$1 billion;
  - (c) that hospitals have failed to maintain benchmark cash-on-hand holdings and are struggling to pay staff salaries and suppliers on time; and
- (4) further notes that under the leadership of the Honourable Jacinta Allan MP, the Department of Health is in disarray and the Labor government's financial mismanagement and record debt is starving funding from Victorian hospitals leading to poorer outcomes for Victorian patients.

I am pleased to rise on this important motion that we will be starting on before lunch and then will continue with after the lunchbreak no doubt. It is an important motion. I say that because it is in relation to the many issues that are plaguing Victoria's health system. It is really that last line in my motion that I am really concerned about, around poorer outcomes for Victorian patients, because as a government when you have the responsibility to provide services to your community you are meant to deliver services that are meeting the needs of the community. What we have seen under Labor over 10 years is a decline in services, and their latest plans to amalgamate health services, with the network that they are establishing and the mergers of hospitals and radiology and pathology and IT systems and all of these aspects, are going to lead to a massive decline in service delivery. It is not only me saying this; it is others saying this, and I will come to that. But the concerns around the lack of detail are very concerning.

The government came out over the Christmas break and announced their plans to establish the health service networks, but there really has been a lack of clarity around what this means and no detail about how it will actually be undertaken. I did have a briefing with the Alfred CEO and the new Frankston CEO and I asked them some of these questions. 'You're coming out and talking about this, and you've reached out to speak to me about the merger of Bayside Health,' which includes hospitals in Gippsland. It is bizarre how these networks are even set up and how they have put hospitals in areas that do not have anything really in common. Kooweerup and other hospitals in Gippsland coming into Bayside Health makes no sense, but when I did ask the CEOs, 'What are you doing? Are you having a centralised roster system?' they could not answer that. They could not answer whether that was going to occur. They could not answer what happens when patients are transferred from Frankston to the Alfred and then discharged. 'With the IT system what would that look like?' 'No, the discharge is still done with paper.' So there is no detail around how the infrastructure around these very important elements is going to be set up. We know there is no detail because the government actually cannot deliver what they are promising. When they say no frontline services are being cut, I would dispute that. Security guards I think play an important role in frontline protection for staff and patients, and they are being cut. Security guards are being cut in hospitals right across the state. We know that we have had an increase in occupational violence, especially in emergency departments – the code blacks, the code greys; the issues that arise are very, very significant. These are cuts that are impacting the delivery of frontline services.

The Grampians Health amalgamation that has occurred, which my colleague Emma Kealy has spoken out on a number of times, is a failure; it is actually a failure. It is one of the worst performing health services in the state. They had people that were delivering a service to their local area in Horsham working in the laundry and linen department. There will be 20 jobs lost there – 20 jobs lost in Horsham as a result of the amalgamation of these services. Disgracefully, these people were travelling 2000 kilometres a week to do their job in Ballarat because the service had been closed down in Horsham, and this heartless, cruel government on Valentine's Day told them their jobs were gone. So they have got no jobs – gone. These people depend on their jobs in these areas, and this is what we have been concerned about – the loss of jobs that will have an impact on the amenity of towns and regional centres and their ability to be a sustainable entity.

We have seen it, Ms Bath, with the shutdown in Gippsland of the forestry industry and the impact on those local jobs – the diminishment. This is something that Labor just do not understand. They actually do not care about regional Victoria – it is so obvious, but it is so heartbreaking.

As somebody who grew up in regional Victoria, 4½ hours from Melbourne, I understand the importance of primary health care. I understand the importance of having access to services that can assist you in a time of need. No-one in country Victoria expects large hospitals to be operating and that therefore they will be treated immediately. They understand they have to travel to Melbourne to get proper treatment and services and care and management in some instances, and that is why we do have world-class health services like Peter MacCallum and our trauma centres at the Alfred and the like. Everybody understands that, but they know you cannot get basic services like maternity services and you cannot get support to travel to get your dialysis – life-saving treatments, because if you do not have dialysis you die – and this cruel government has cut the funding for these support services. This is what I am talking about when I am talking about the delivery of care. It is not just a hospital and what is going on, it is actually what happens inside the hospital, like the dialysis treatment or like maternity services.

I have asked the minister around VPTAS, the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme. In April last year she promised me it was back on track and that people were getting their payments done when they needed to have that support if they were travelling from regional Victoria to metropolitan Melbourne for treatment. For cancer treatments they have to stay overnight. It is a huge cost that they have got to find, and that program is there to support regional Victorians that do not have the luxury that metropolitan residents have, who can access health services far more easily. That has not been fixed. I was told by one of my colleagues today that their constituents are still waiting up to 20 weeks for payments. Nothing has been fixed. This government promises the world and delivers very little. Their words mean nothing; their words are actually cheap, because –

**The PRESIDENT:** I apologise, Ms Crozier. I need to interrupt for questions and ministers statements.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Housing**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:00): (805) My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, as your government plans to knock down Victoria's public housing towers, my question is about the public land on which those towers are built. As Labor for Housing convener Julijana Todorovic was reported saying in the *Age*:

It is critical that the land remains in public hands, otherwise it will be for future generations to buy back the assets like we're seeing with the SEC.

Can you please assure Victorians that across the redevelopment of all 44 public housing sites none of the public land will be sold or leased to private interests? And if you cannot provide that assurance, what percentage of public land will actually remain in public hands?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:01): Thank you very much for your question, Ms Copsey. What I would say at the outset has characterised a significant departure from the operation of the Greens party on the matters of housing is that since the departure of Dr Ratnam you have actually reached out for a briefing on social housing policy. That was after dozens of invitations from me for the purpose of that discussion. So I want to say thank you for engaging on that work and on the processes, including as they relate to towers relocations and to the very careful work that is being undertaken with residents to address the concerns that you have raised in particular on engagement around offers and around the areas that people are nominating for the purpose of relocation. I just want to say thank you for that work. I think the briefing happened last Thursday, and there were some matters that were taken on notice by departmental representatives who attended that meeting – so a welcome departure from Dr Ratnam’s legacy.

I want to also go to the work that has been happening on the towers relocations, and this is one of the areas where misinformation and disinformation have really caused an awful lot of distress and anguish for people who call those towers home. I have been really clear on many occasions that I am under no illusions about the impact of change on communities who call the towers home. We have got around 6660 homes across these sites. It is about 40 hectares of land. One of the things that we have announced as part of that towers redevelopment process is a very clear confirmation that people will not be left homeless as a result of relocations – that people will have a right of return, that we will continue to work with people around the redevelopment of these sites and that once the relocations have been undertaken and that redevelopment has occurred there will be a right of return to the sites or to the neighbourhood, obviously where ongoing eligibility is maintained.

I am continuing to work on and work with and work within communities and governments around the future planning for the use of this land – whether it is for the purpose of public housing or whether it is a ground lease model, for example, where land remains in public hands – and to understand how we can meet that densification that again is part of addressing the broader challenges across the social housing system and the lack of availability that we know renters everywhere are continuing to grapple with as part of the broader housing statement work.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:04): Thank you, Minister, I note that you did not come to the particular question that I asked, but thanks for the background. Across all the states and territories, Victoria has the lowest percentage of social housing in the country by far, with only 2.9 per cent of all households in our state being either public housing or community housing. New South Wales, by comparison, has 4.4 per cent; South Australia, 5.9 per cent; and Tasmania, 6.1 per cent. Minister, do you have a target for social housing as a percentage of all households in Victoria, and if so, what is it?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:04): Thank you very much for that question. I want to take you to the report on government services. I suspect that is where you are heading, around the Productivity Commission report and the ongoing demand for housing assistance, and this is not just in Victoria but around Australia. Our capital expenditure of \$1.38 billion on social housing is now the highest in the country, and we also have the highest expenditure on homelessness services of any jurisdiction. This is again about making sure that we are addressing the need for social housing across the entire state, not just in metropolitan Melbourne, and this is where the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, plus the additional \$1 billion in the Regional Housing Fund, amongst other programs, take the investment across social and affordable housing capital and services and programs to well over \$9 billion since 2014.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:06): (806) My question is to the Treasurer, and it concerns the damning Auditor-General's report released today, which has revealed a \$300 million blowout to the Suburban Rail Loop early works package that was not specifically disclosed in the budget. I ask: why was this blowout not disclosed, and instead hidden from the public?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:06): In the spirit of ensuring that the house gets the answers that it seeks, Ms Shing and I will regularly confer in relation to matters that are cross portfolio. But in relation to the VAGO report, I think it is important to note that it covers changes to TEIs, and these have been disclosed and brought to book in last year's budget. It demonstrates that although the vast majority of government projects are on time and on budget, and of course they support thousands and thousands of jobs across the state –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES**: It is a common feature for Mr Davis to cherrypick information from a report, so therefore it is the opportunity that he is presenting me to respond in a way that talks to the report and what it discloses. An increase in TEI simply means more investment in a project very often, and this can be attributed to a range of factors. There can be an expansion in the scope of the project, there can be a change in the procurement approach to the project and often – and we would welcome more and more of this – it can mean the Commonwealth getting on board and contributing to a project; therefore obviously the project is worth more and it needs to be recognised as costing more because it delivers more.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES**: Ms Shing is itching to talk about the SRL project in relation to it being on track and the first stage being delivered by 2035.

In relation to the VAGO report, I just want to provide a few examples of some of the TEI explanations that I went through before. For example, if you look at the car parks for commuters project, the TEI increased because the scope increased.

**David Davis**: On a point of order, President, I asked about a very specific point about the Suburban Rail Loop and a specific cost overrun. For the minister's benefit, it is appendix D, page 56.

**The PRESIDENT**: That is not a point of order. I think the minister was being relevant to the question. It is a bit noisy. Can I ask for the noise level to be brought down a bit, and can I ask Minister Shing to stop using a prop; otherwise it will be endless that people will be showing props.

**Jaclyn SYMES**: As I said, I am just concerned about the cherrypicking of explanations of the VAGO report, and I was at pains to explain TEI and what that can do in relation to estimates.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES**: You have asked a specific question about the SRL, which I know Minister Shing is very keen to get up, but what I can confirm, Mr Davis, is that the \$300 million refers to an amount approved by government to plan and develop SRL which is not included in the budget papers.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): Treasurer, thank you, but you are responsible for the budget, and it says this initial amount was not specifically disclosed in the budget papers, and that is the purpose of my question. Further on this matter, the Auditor's report has revealed the SRL East early works package is going through a 'pricing reset'. Will you depart from your predecessor and make any additional blowouts public in the budget rather than hiding them?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:10): Mr Davis, this project remains on time and on budget in relation to the commitments that have been given.

*Members interjecting.*

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the Treasurer is not allowed to mislead the house.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** That is not a point of order. The Treasurer to continue and, hopefully – I am not reflecting on one side of the chamber; I am reflecting on both – we can hear her.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Mr Davis, the SRL project: we will have tunnel-boring machines in the ground; we will have trains running on those lines by 2035. This is a project that will cost money, yes. This is an investment that is worth it. Victorians deserve it. Coming from an opposition who does nothing, builds nothing and criticises everything, I will back us every time.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:11): I move:

That the minister's answer be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### **Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:12): How timely it is to be able to talk to the chamber about the Suburban Rail Loop and how that is supporting a pipeline of jobs and opportunities for Victorians from all walks of life. Despite the alternate reality occupied by those opposite, works are powering ahead across all six SRL precincts in preparation for the launch of tunnel-boring machines next year. Those opposite have spent years peddling deceit and misinformation about the project, and it seems like every day my job is to come into this place and dispel myths, rumours and fictions of the opposition's imagination. Again, I have got a copy of the business and investment case here and many copies in my office for people should they wish to read them. Let me be clear: the Suburban Rail Loop is Australia's biggest housing project. It was endorsed by Victorians at two state elections and at one federal election and, importantly – Mr Davis, feel free to ask me about this – it remains on time and on budget.

Today's VAGO report, for the avoidance of any doubt, confirms that the TEI for the SRL East project remains at \$30.7 billion, and it is on track for delivery in 2035. So I would suggest, Mr Davis, that you have a very careful look at appendix E, page 14, of today's report, where you will indeed hopefully be able to interpret that correctly. Last week our trusted partner in Canberra, infrastructure minister Catherine King, released the \$2.2 billion that has been committed, and this is in addition to the \$300 million for project planning and development. We have got 1500 Victorians already working across the project. Within peak construction we will have a further 24,000 good, paying jobs added to the Victorian economy as a direct result of this transformational piece of infrastructure. This will include engineers, painters, electricians, plumbers, surveyors, gardeners and maintenance workers. We are investing in this work. It is interesting to see what you are doing as you rip yourselves apart in trying to come to a decision about whether you support this project or not.

#### **Duck hunting**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:14): (807) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. The select committee on recreational native bird hunting arrangements heard damning evidence of wounding rates being up to 40 per cent, inhumane and illegal killing methods, deliberate shooting over bag limits and noncompliance that is commonplace and widespread. The government of course chose to ignore the committee's main recommendation to ban recreational duck shooting and instead announced \$12 million of taxpayer

money on so-called commonsense reforms. The evidence that guided these reforms was due to the behaviour of the existing shooting fraternity, so why are only new shooters required to undergo mandatory training and testing?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:15): I thank Ms Purcell for her advocacy in this area. Obviously this is a matter for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and it will be referred to him as per the standing orders.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:15): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. The government's decision to increase the season length and bag limit for this year's season was made despite knowing that waterbird numbers are at an all-time low. Instead of taking action to protect vulnerable species, they have decided that now is the right time to experiment with a brand new model. The adaptive harvest model fails to account for the illegal shooting of protected species, consistently high wounding rates and the cultural significance of the sites where shooting occurs. Why did the government close off preseason consultation, which they have always previously conducted, with wildlife experts and traditional owners ahead of this year's announcement?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:16): Again, I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary question, and as per the substantive, I will refer that to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:16): (808) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Minister, the Auditor-General's major projects performance report tabled earlier today has revealed that the Suburban Rail Loop East early works package is currently going through a pricing reset with the SRLA's contractor to factor in items that were unknown or uncertain at the time the contract was awarded. These include unknown ground conditions, hazards and contamination at some sites. Will you release a list of which sites are contaminated?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:17): If only the grasshopper could teach the sensei a little bit about the way in which questions on major projects can be asked. Again, you have not had to deliver any major projects. You have never actually committed to delivering any major projects, and to that end and for that reason, you would not understand the way in which early works are undertaken.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the minister knows her task at question time is to answer questions, not to attack the opposition.

**The PRESIDENT:** I uphold the point of order. The minister is to answer the question.

**Harriet SHING:** 'Sensei' actually means 'master', Mr Davis, so I am sorry if you view that as an insult, and I do indeed withdraw and commit not to refer to you as such ever again. Now, what I would say, when we are looking at TEI, is that when you do the early works for a project that involves tunnelling underground, it is really normal to have a high degree of variability in those early works processes. That is because you need to be able to understand what it is that you are uncovering, and this is also why we do this work up-front. When we talk to the \$300 million that has been added to the SRL East envelope, this is also about making sure that it remains in budget.

As I just said in my ministers statement, we are continuing with the work to have tunnel-boring machines in the ground next year –

**A member** interjected.

**Harriet SHING:** You may well rail against that – excuse the pun – but it has to happen, and residents and communities know that it will mean important and beneficial changes for Victorians, for your kids, for your grandkids and for a better –

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, President, I asked the minister if she will release a list or make public the contaminated sites along the early works of SRL East, and she has not come close to that. I ask that you bring the minister back to the question.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will bring the minister back to the question.

**Harriet SHING:** What I would say to you, Mr Mulholland, is that for the avoidance of any doubt – and you did refer to the Auditor-General’s report today – tunnel-boring machines will be in the ground next year. Trains will be running on this 26-kilometre dual-tunnel project in 2035, unless of course you are saying that you are going to rip up this contract and these processes.

SRL East infrastructure received planning approvals in September 2022. In the course of that work, for the purpose of the environment effects statement, overall many impacts will be avoided by putting the rail underground, and the environmental effects of SRL East have been identified and carefully considered throughout the environment effects statement work. There are a range of enhanced measures and outcomes for residents and traders during the project’s construction and operation – and you will know if you go to any of those six sites what those look like – and we have also adopted changes and conditions required to ensure the project’s environmental effects are appropriately managed. Mr Mulholland, we need to be able to do these early works to understand what risks look like, and this is the same conversation we had around a risk register. You take a due diligence process to understand what risk is in order to mitigate, manage and wherever possible reduce to zero the risks associated with this work. It will mean that as those further stages of the project across the entire loop continue, we do have the best processes in hand to be able to manage it.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:20): I note that there have been problems that have been exposed, obviously, since the environment effects statement, and this is evidence of that. I ask the minister: how will the minister and the SRLA deal with these contaminated sites?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:21): Thank you, Mr Mulholland, for perhaps giving me a direction in your supplementary question that enables me to go to what it means to develop and to deliver infrastructure across industrial land. When we do that, we need to make sure that we have a good understanding of the profile and condition of industrial land, which is not known or completely understood before such time as that early work gets underway. The work for early works processes – and there is a hint in the title – is to be able to understand what early work involvement and impact looks like. This is where, again, we will engage very, very carefully across communities adjacent to those industrial and formerly industrial sites and we will notify communities as part of normal engagement processes. SRLA is on the ground every single day making sure that people have accurate information, as much as anything to counter the mythology that you peddle at every opportunity.

#### **Ministers statements: water policy**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:22): With the impacts of climate change increasing, recycled water has a vital role in Victoria’s future. This is why the Allan Labor government was proud to back the \$11.8 million Horsham SmartWater project. This recently completed project will improve the quality and accessibility of Horsham’s recycled water. A brand new network of pipes through the city of Horsham now connects to vital community spaces. This supports up to 126 megalitres of recycled water per year to help keep many parks and ovals green for families to enjoy and saves more of our precious drinking water. Horsham SmartFarm is also now home to a new reverse osmosis plant. This will ensure Victoria’s researchers have more access to high-quality water for innovative crop research. More purified recycled water will be used to irrigate over 50 hectares of grain, oilseed and legume crops, supporting Agriculture Victoria researchers to remain at the cutting edge of international agricultural research. This research helps to improve the profitability, productivity and sustainability of crop production. Over the past seven years our Labor government has co-invested over \$73 million in over 170 integrated water management



projects just like this one across the state. In a time of climate change and increased urbanisation, we need to be creative about using stormwater and recycled water to protect our precious water supply to get the best outcomes for our communities, because we know the importance of a sustainable water system for industry, the environment, our economy and of course our growing communities.

### **Bendigo crime**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:24): (809) My question today is for the minister representing the Attorney-General. Bendigo has seen a shocking uptick in crime in the past 12 months. In the year ending September 2024 crime rates were up by 13.4 per cent. Thefts, burglaries and assaults – including that of three men on Saturday 8 February, allegedly by a gang of six youths, which left the victims with horrific injuries in hospital – have all increased. My constituents are scared, concerned and downright angry with the rate of crime in their town. As Victoria’s chief lawmaker, what are the Attorney’s plans to reduce the rate of serious crime in regional Victoria, in particular Bendigo?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:24): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for her question for the Attorney-General. I might note that some of those issues about crime prevention might overlap with the police minister, but I will forward it on to the Attorney-General because I know the police minister and the Attorney-General are both enthusiastic about getting our justice settings right, and they are doing that work as we speak. In line with the standing orders, I will forward on that question for an appropriate response.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:25): I thank the minister for his response. My constituents are frustrated and angry at the catch-and-release model the government seems to have adopted over the past 10 years. Too many times have they seen offenders arrested and bailed, only for them to reoffend within hours. When will the government put the safety of the community over the comfort of criminals?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:25): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for that supplementary question. I will ensure that it is passed on to the Attorney-General in the other place and gets a response in line with the standing orders.

### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:25): (810) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and it goes to the VAGO report released today. One of the recommendations was to:

Develop ... meaningful public reporting on major projects’ performance ...

- clearly describing underlying reasons why a project’s date or schedule has changed instead of only describing what the change was

The SRLA has disagreed and rejected this recommendation. Why?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:26): Thank you, Mr Mulholland. Again, I just want to, for the avoidance of any doubt in your minds or indeed the minds of people with whom you might speak, confirm to you the project is on time and on budget. The TEI remains at the levels that were forecast within the band that was published by government, by the SRLA, and as set out in the business and investment case. Again, Mr Mulholland, I have got a copy here in my drawer. I have got dozens of copies down in my office. Let us talk about the return on investment and TEI being between 1.1 and 1.7, and then let us also talk about the \$300 million –

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, President, on relevance, I asked why the SRLA has rejected a clear recommendation from the report as to their reporting on delays.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the minister was first giving us some background. I will call her to the question.

**Harriet SHING:** Mr Mulholland, what a shame you do not actually want to know about the project that you are turning a blind eye to, as it will reduce and address so many of the issues around congestion and around a lack of access to jobs, to public transport, to education and to health care. You are determined to oppose a project that will address the very issues that you say are front of mind for Victorians.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, it was a very straightforward, narrow question about the SRLA's decision to reject the Auditor's view. The question is simple and straightforward, but the minister is now going on a frolic and around the block.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the minister knows the question. There is no need to repeat it. I will call the minister.

**Harriet SHING:** Thank you, Mr Davis. Right. If you think that the provision of information about the largest housing project we have in Australia is a frolic, then that reflects more on you –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, relevance is important. But also, she started off with an attack on the opposition instead of answering the question. She has to answer the question, not a question of her own choosing.

**The PRESIDENT:** It is very difficult, because since your last point of order it has been about 5 seconds. I am trying to work out whether she was relevant or not, but I think the minister was relevant within the 5 seconds.

**Harriet SHING:** When we work through the processes associated with progression of a project, there are of course a number of steps that need to be taken to ensure that all phases of a project in relation to their status and progress are fully understood. This is where, again, when we have changes to estimated completion dates this is able to be contemplated and achieved to better reflect the detailed schedule of work, Mr Mulholland. This includes ground conditions being better understood. It includes –

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, President, on relevance, the minister is not going near the question. The Auditor clearly recommended knowing why a project's date or schedule has changed instead of only describing what the change was. The SRLA has rejected that recommendation, and I asked the minister why.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think that actually the minister was getting to the crux of the answer then, so I call the minister.

**Harriet SHING:** When we talk about the transparency that you are after, I would encourage you to read the budget papers. I would encourage you to look to the work that is set out in the reporting as part of annual reports, and there is an annual audit process by VAGO. There is already a process undertaken by the Auditor-General, and when we talk about changes to early works, as I said in an answer to an earlier question, ground conditions are better understood, including by SRLA, when we take possession of a site and when we can undertake those extensive geotechnical investigations. This is common practice in early phases of major transport infrastructure, but you would not know because you have never delivered any.

**David Davis:** President, the point of order is very clear. It is a relevance point. The minister did not answer the question in any way. She did not go near the point of why she is not accepting the Auditor's recommendation.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis, I do my best in real time to embrace and understand the question and the answer, and I think I just embraced it. The minister said the answer to the question is because there is already a process. I hate paraphrasing people, but that is where I have come to. At the end of

question time people can call points of order to ask me to review if I am right or not, but that is what I gleaned out of the last 5 minutes.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:32): The minister says to go and read the budget, but if we went and read the budget from last year we would not have found the \$300 million blowout that we have found today in the VAGO report. The VAGO report also reveals that early works have been delayed by nine months and indicates that the delays in the SRL East initial early works could delay the main project itself. Is this correct?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:33): In the preamble to your supplementary, Mr Mulholland, you said that it was not in the budget papers. What a shame. I do not think that you were here in 2019, because if you went back and had a look at those budget papers you would actually see that it is there. So why don't you have a squiz? I am not going to hold them up today, because again you will call them props, but we have actually committed that money. We are determined to make sure that we deliver the project on time and on budget. And as I have confirmed to you, changes in some of the early works timings are being actively managed to minimise any potential impacts on other main works. This is not an uncommon process as part of major projects, but you would not know that, because you have never delivered any. The first tunnel-boring machine will be in the ground next year. Trains will be running by 2035, unless of course you are saying that you are not going to proceed with SRL, whether through the east or anywhere else, in which case you need to come clean and fess up to that fact.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, again the minister is attacking the opposition rather than answering the question.

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister has finished her answer.

#### **Ministers statements: early childhood education and care**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:34): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting growing communities in the north of Melbourne through our Building Blocks partnership with Hume City Council. Last week I had the pleasure of visiting Everley estate in Sunbury to announce \$4.5 million to build the new Jacksons Creek community centre alongside the member for Sunbury Josh Bull from the other place, as well as the Hume mayor. It was a very windy morning in Sunbury, but the excitement about the new centre filled the air. The new Jacksons Creek community centre will include two kinder rooms, creating 118 additional kinder places for Sunbury families. It will also offer co-located maternal and child health services alongside community activity spaces. This is vital for the growing north of Melbourne, with the new integrated children's centre being built on a greenfield site. We know that this location will soon be home to many families, and thanks to this government they will have a beautiful new kinder and maternal and child health room ready for their littlest residents to grow and learn. This project is part of our government's \$12.9 million Building Blocks partnership with Hume City Council. This will deliver six new and expanded kinders for the Hume LGA, creating 450 kinder places for local families.

Since 2021 the Allan Labor government has invested \$452 million and entered into 17 Building Blocks partnerships supporting the delivery of 107 new and expanded kinders as well as providing essential access to child, family and community services in areas where they are needed most. It is not just great news in the Sunbury electorate. We are delivering these facilities right across the state. On Monday I visited the Epalock Crescent kinder alongside the member for St Albans, Minister Suleyman from the other place, to open the newly rebuilt kinder, which has now doubled its capacity. When it comes to delivering for Victorian children and families, it is the Allan Labor government that delivers. We promised we would deliver free kinder and we have done that, while those opposite continue to want to charge families for their education.

### Cannabis law reform

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:36): (811) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place, represented by Minister Shing. We welcome changes to the Road Safety Act that will offer a modicum of justice to the thousands of medicinal cannabis patients who have been nervous about driving while taking their prescribed medication, and we commend the government on its reforms. The changes come into effect on 1 March and will replace the mandatory loss of licence for a person found with THC in their system at a roadside drug test, instead allowing a magistrate discretion not to automatically cancel the person's licence if they are unimpaired when tested and have an up-to-date script for medicinal cannabis. We ask: what is the government doing to inform patients and the wider community of this important reform?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:37): Thank you very much for that question, Mr Ettershank. As you rightly point out, I have responsibility for referring matters on to the relevant minister in the other place, and I will do so for a response in accordance with the standing orders.

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:37): I thank the minister for her assistance. The process for a patient to have their matter heard before a magistrate if they have tested positive for THC while driving is not as straightforward as one might suppose. A driver may not know that if they do nothing their licence will automatically be suspended or that they have to elect to have their case transferred to the Magistrates' Court. We ask: what is the government doing in terms of providing easy-to-access legal guidance to prescription holders who are found to have THC in their system during a roadside drug test?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:38): Thank you, Mr Ettershank. Again I will seek an answer from the minister in accordance with the standing orders.

### Commercial passenger vehicle industry

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:38): (812) My question is to the Minister for Disability. *60 Minutes* on Sunday revealed footage and other proof of people with profound disabilities being physically abused, inappropriately manhandled and continually ripped off with overcharging by taxidrivars – one support service over 450 times. As disability minister, what action have you taken or will you take in relation to these horrendous revelations?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:38): Thank you, Mr McGowan, for your question. I think we would all in this place agree that what was revealed in the *60 Minutes* episode was particularly heinous. Certainly one of the great privileges of my role and the portfolios that I hold is the opportunity to be a voice for those who do not have one or whose voice is limited. Often that is children and it is certainly also people with disability. So I thank you for the question. I thank you for your previous interest in disability matters as well. I note that it was you who asked me a question in relation to the state disability plan in the adjournment debate at the end of last year, which we were also pleased to table shortly after.

As I said, all in this place would agree that those matters which were revealed in the media were completely unacceptable. Preying on vulnerable Victorians is a disgrace. Preying on vulnerable Victorians who are seeking to access transport, in this case taxi services, is absolutely disgraceful. There are penalties for those who breach the rules, including fines where there has been overcharging. Of course price gouging has no place in our community when it comes to the regulations that drivers must use for their metered trips. That is something that, through Minister Williams and her portfolio, is being addressed. We certainly, from a disability minister's perspective, know that there needs to be more done to protect those who are most vulnerable, and these reports are particularly concerning. I have asked for further advice on what more can be done in this space, because I think everyone in this

place would agree that taking advantage of those who cannot speak for themselves and cannot defend themselves is a particularly heinous crime and should be addressed as such.

I would note our disability inclusion plan *Inclusive Victoria*. We are midway through that. We have tabled the midway report, as I have previously publicly said. Of the 175 original actions, some of which went to ensuring that we have accessible and inclusive transport in Victoria, 28 are complete; a further 139 are on track to be completed by the time that they were scheduled to be so, which is June 2026. We have added additional actions as well because we know that we can and we should do more, and this is a very good example of that.

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:41): I thank the minister for her response. Shockingly, some of the most vulnerable locals in my electorate in Ringwood are among the hardest hit. Confidential files obtained by Nick McKenzie found that Maroondah Hospital was defrauded 774 times through the rampant fraud of taxpayer-funded Cabcharge customers, used by some of our community's most vulnerable, including hospital patients, the unwell, locals with disabilities and, relevantly, local clients on the national disability insurance scheme. Has the minister been briefed in respect to the incidents at Maroondah Hospital, and what assurance can she provide my constituents that this abuse of our most vulnerable has stopped?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:42): I again thank Mr McGowan for his question and for his interest in these matters. As I said in my substantive response, these issues go across the responsibilities of the minister for transport as well as my role of being in a position to advocate for those who have disabilities. In relation to the specifics of the matter, as I said, preying on vulnerable Victorians who depend on taxi services is obviously disgraceful. Preying on those who in some way have no capacity to advocate for themselves or defend themselves is particularly heinous. I would note that drivers can, under the regulations, face significant penalties for breaching rules, including a fine of up to \$11,855 for overcharging. As I said, price gouging has no place in Victoria, and we have introduced regulations – not through my portfolio, through others' portfolios – so that drivers must use their meters for trips from ranks or when hailed on the streets. But we know that more needs to be done to protect those passengers, and of course I give a commitment that we will continue to work with the minister for transport on these matters from a disability perspective.

#### **Ministers statements: cost of living**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:43): I did want to take the opportunity to collectively breathe a sigh of relief with most Victorians at the decision of the RBA to deliver the first interest rate cut in four years yesterday. This has been very welcome relief for families and mortgage holders. The rate cut will of course help many with an average mortgage to the tune of around \$100 a month. But of course it is not lost on me that 13 interest rate hikes delivered by the RBA have been a major cause of pressure on family budgets, and it will take more than just one rate cut to make it better.

My number one focus as Treasurer – and you will hear this again and again – is Victorian families and individuals and doing what I can do to support them. This means much-needed cost-of-living relief to ease the pressure. That is why the \$400 school saving bonus is just so popular. I am hearing time and time again from families that are relying on that, particularly for school uniforms. Also the power saving bonus is an example, as are free kinder and free TAFE, and many ministers will have examples of cost-of-living announcements that they will be bringing time and time again. I want to assure the chamber that we are on the right track for economic growth. You will hear me speaking about this as well. The Victorian economy is going from strength to strength – inflation is down, the economy is growing and unemployment is low. There are many on record indicating that Victoria is heading in the right direction, and there are many people that like to talk down the state. I will not talk down the state. Rating agencies have rated Victoria as stable right now.

Victorian families are watching every dollar, and I think that rightfully they expect government to do the same. When I hand down the budget on 20 May, families can be assured that it will be about delivering for them. It is my role to make sure investments are delivering the services that Victorians rely on across the whole state and also particularly focusing on the west. Can I congratulate John Lister on becoming the new member for Werribee. He is a strong advocate who has already been knocking on my door to have a conversation, a terrific local teacher and a former CFA volunteer. It is pretty simple: since we came to government we have been investing all around the state.

### Written responses

**The PRESIDENT** (12:46): Minister Shing will get responses for Mr Ettershank to both of his questions to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Mr Erdogan will get responses for both of Mrs Tyrrell's questions to the Attorney-General in line with the standing orders and Minister Tierney will get responses for Ms Purcell's questions to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation in line with the standing orders.

### Constituency questions

#### Western Victoria Region

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (12:46): (1378) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I note that the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund will be available to more than 200,000 students across the state and has already helped more than 2 million kids to go to camps and excursions since it was introduced by the Labor government. I also note that the fund comes on top of the \$400 school saving bonus for around 700,000 students statewide. Victorian families have now saved over \$100 million on back-to-school costs thanks to the school saving bonus. Given the government's ongoing investment in helping Victorian families reduce the cost of camps and excursions, Minister, I would ask: how is the Allan government's Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund benefiting families and children in my electorate of Western Victoria?

#### Northern Victoria Region

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:47): (1379) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. A resident of Kyneton has contacted me following community concerns that the Kyneton VicRoads office will close when the current building lease expires on 30 June 2025. Residents fear they will be forced to travel to Sunbury VicRoads to pay for registration and to undergo licence testing. I note the government has undertaken a modernisation program in a joint venture arrangement with superannuation funds to remodel VicRoads. Can the minister please confirm that no VicRoads offices in Northern Victoria will be closed and that local VicRoads services will continue?

#### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1380) My question today is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it relates to the accessibility barriers people are facing over at Ivanhoe station. Lisa has started a change.org petition to draw awareness to the fact that Ivanhoe station does not have any tactile ground surface indicators. These are the bumpy strips that assist people who have impaired vision to navigate our public transport stations safely. Lisa's daughter Lilly is blind and about to start university. Ivanhoe is her nearest station, and it would be the easiest way for her to travel to uni; however, without the tactile surface indicators it is just too dangerous for Lilly to use this station. Minister, I have called before for this train station to be upgraded to make it more accessible. This is an urgent and tangible example of what happens when these upgrades do not occur. Will you install tactile ground surface indicators at Ivanhoe station to ensure that Lilly and others are able to safely catch the train?

#### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1381) My question is for the Minister for Education. I am interested in how the government's planned maintenance program is supporting

schools and students in the Southern Metropolitan Region. The planned maintenance program recently announced 10 schools in southern metropolitan Melbourne will be benefiting from more than \$3 million in funding to help improve facilities around the schools and provide safe, modern and high-quality learning environments. This includes Beaumaris North Primary School, which has been allocated more than \$200,000 to increase accessibility in the school. Brighton Secondary College has been allocated more than \$600,000 to help improve facilities at the school. This is all part of the Labor government's \$110 million investment in the last budget to improve our school infrastructure, ensuring that all students have access to the best possible learning environments. This is Labor building the Education State in Victoria.

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1382) I call on the transport minister to urgently install and implement tactile ground service indicators at Ivanhoe station, as we have heard previously and as we have heard again today, for Lilly Cascun. Not only for Lilly, who is an 18-year-old who studies science at Melbourne University, but for those with low or no vision these are life-saving devices which ensure that we keep our vulnerable citizens safe. There are 26 stations across the metro network that do not have the tactile ground service indicators. For those who do not know what that means, it means the round yellow dots that enable people with low vision or no vision to actually be able to detect the difference between where the platform finishes and where the train line commences. It is absolutely critical. It actually means that at this point in time Lilly has to walk for half an hour. Rather than going from her home to Ivanhoe station, she has to go to the next station, which is half an hour away. That is every single day. We would love for this to be implemented as soon as possible.

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:51): (1383) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Recently I have been contacted by a constituent raising a concern about the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's sale of the historic school, museum and public hall at Tarraville, a sale which will go into private hands. This site has a heritage overlay and is important to the local community. The museum is an integral part of Gippsland's rich history, having been built in 1856, and it is one of the last remaining 19th century buildings in the region. In the 1850s Tarraville was the largest town in Gippsland and with Port Albert played a crucial role in the cattle and sheep trade to Tasmania, also supporting the goldfields trade at the time. Now it is one of Victoria's regional tourist destinations because of its heritage and the stories of the township that its residents offer, along with the great fishing opportunities of the Tarra River. My question is: will the government work with DEECA to stop the sale and protect this wonderful element of Victoria's unique regional history by gifting it to the community?

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:52): (1384) My question is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure in the other place. Good public health care is absolutely fundamental to a healthy community, and the community deserves the best possible health facilities. I wish to thank the minister for our recent tour of the \$1.1 billion Frankston Hospital redevelopment project. I joined the minister, the member for Frankston, the member for Cranbourne, the member for Carrum and the member for Hastings to inspect the progress. When I talk to residents on the Mornington Peninsula people often raise health and health services with me. Could the minister please provide an update on the redevelopment and outline how a redeveloped Frankston Hospital will benefit residents of the Mornington Peninsula? The Mornington Peninsula is growing, with many young families deciding to call the area home as well as people moving for a better lifestyle at all ages of life, including retirement. The progress of the hospital redevelopment is important not only for the residents who will use the service but for the workforce, who do an incredible job to keep us well every day.

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): (1385) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and I ask the minister: what action are you taking to oppose the construction of a waste transfer station at 290 Hallam Road, Hampton Park? Planning permission was granted before councils had been elected and sworn in and before the rezoning was approved by the Minister for Planning. While there is current litigation by the Environment Protection Authority, the EPA, against Veolia for serious breaches, last night it was revealed that the proposed facility will be just 54 metres from a residential zoning area, which could mean it is within 60 metres of family homes, and it will be in the middle of a densely populated residential area. Residents have not been properly informed. Those who have been are extremely concerned about the serious adverse environmental and social impacts from processing 550,000 tonnes of putrescible and inert waste each year, and the Labor state government are ignoring constituents' concerns.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:54): (1386) My question today is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. For over 15 years the Elwood community has fought for a pedestrian-operated crossing on Glen Huntly Road near Elster Creek and Elwood Primary School, yet still children, families and locals are forced daily to dodge trucks and speeding cars to cross this dangerous road. A proper crossing would allow kids to safely reach the school grounds out of the limited hours when the crossing supervisors attend. There have been many crashes recorded in the area, the majority of which resulted in injuries, and residents continue to report countless near misses. A safe crossing would also create broader benefits, connecting the Elster Creek walking and cycling trail and making it safer for pedestrians, cyclists and local commuters while also bringing down congestion and emissions. Minister, my constituents want to know: when will Labor fully fund and install a pedestrian-operated crossing on Glen Huntly Road?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:55): (1387) My constituency question is to the Minister for Equality. Fitzroy in my electorate came alive with colour and vibrancy as thousands gathered to celebrate the Midsumma street party. The fantastic weather set the perfect scene for this incredible event, bringing together LGBTIQ+ communities and their allies to celebrate pride, diversity and inclusion. This celebration follows the 30th annual Midsumma Pride March in St Kilda, where we were proud to march alongside community members. Since 2015 a Labor Premier has walked with the community, demonstrating a strong commitment to LGBTIQ+ equality. From delivering record support for Pride events to opening the Victorian Pride Centre, Labor has taken significant steps to address equality. Can the minister outline how the Allan Labor government is continuing to support the LGBTIQ+ community in Northern Metropolitan Region in particular and what further measures are being implemented to ensure further progress towards equality?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1388) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns Lithgow Street in Beveridge and the shocking access for local communities to the Hume. Cars along Lithgow Street are backed up for 45 minutes sometimes in the morning, up to 2 kilometres in the early morning, as Beveridge families try to get to work or drop the kids at school and go about their day. The project overview for Camerons Lane acknowledges that you have got \$900 million in federal funding sitting in your bank account committed to the interchange to help get cars onto the freeway. The business case process began two years ago. This is another failure on Rob Mitchell's watch and under this Victorian Labor government as well. The people of Beveridge have waited long enough. When will you finally start this long overdue project?



### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1389) My constituency question is for the Attorney-General. My constituent is a resident of Mordialloc. Like many others in our community, she recently needed a document witnessed by a justice of the peace. What she anticipated to be a relatively straightforward process became quite the opposite. Unable to visit her nearest document-signing station, where a JP is only available Wednesday mornings, she contacted several police stations and was told that they no longer offer JP services. When reaching out to individual JPs, three out of the four she spoke to were unable to attend, as they were sick in hospital. There are simply not enough JPs to meet the needs of the community. So my constituent asks: will you commit to increasing the number of active and available JPs in the south-east electorate to ensure improved access to this essential community service?

### Western Victoria Region

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:57): (1390) My question is for the Assistant Treasurer and concerns the Essential Services Commission's grant of an electricity transmission licence to Transmission Company Victoria, TCV. Minister, this is a complete fiction. It is a travesty of a decision, ignoring not only the consultation responses from the community but the letter and the spirit of the rules. TCV has no intention whatsoever of transmitting electricity – it cannot and it will not. In fact as a wholly owned AEMO subsidiary, that would be completely inappropriate. This decision bends the rules, simply to allow TCV to exploit the law to force access to the 250 farms potentially affected by the VNI West project. Instead of changing the law, this government's agencies are ignoring it. Yet again ministers are riding roughshod over existing rules to force through this unwanted ill-designed project. I ask the minister to request ESC reconsider this decision immediately.

### Northern Victoria Region

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:59): (1391) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister give a guarantee that the VicRoads office in Kyneton will remain open and that the government has no plans to close it? VicRoads centres are a crucial service for rural Victorians, and the office in Kyneton is vital to serving residents and businesses in the Macedon Ranges region. However, rumours are swirling that the VicRoads office in Kyneton will be closing this year because the Allan Labor government has decided not to renew the lease on the building. Maybe they want to use the money to help pay for the Suburban Rail Loop, after the federal government said there is no more help. Residents will now have to travel almost an hour to Bendigo or Sunbury to renew their licences, pay registration or have their photo taken, and that is when traffic is good, which it rarely is in Victoria, because the Allan Labor government has neglected the regional road network for a decade and the government's only answer is to reduce speed limits, which creates longer travelling times.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:00): (1392) My constituency question is for the attention of the Minister for Health. The Hippocratic oath for doctors is 'Do no harm'. I spoke with a doctor, a constituent of mine who I have known for many years, this morning, who is clearly very concerned about the antisemitism occurring in Victorian hospitals. As he said to me, 'The potential for the health system is unthinkable.' The minister is now finally saying that political clothing in hospitals is unacceptable and warning it will not be tolerated, so I ask: how will you ensure, Minister, this is enforced?

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (13:00): (1393) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Minister, I received correspondence from a resident named Keith, who was moving to a new development, Banyan Place estate in Officer. Throughout the outer suburbs residents are deprived of critical infrastructure needed for their basic needs. From roads to telecommunication, they

are forced to accept third-rate services that other Melburnians do not experience. Keith noted that there are no school bus connections between Cardinia Road station and Banyan Place or Kaduna Park estate, leaving students studying in other parts of Melbourne to depend on their parents for drop-offs and pick-ups. This adds additional stress to mums and dads, who are often time-poor. Can the minister please advise what actions will be taken to add dedicated bus school service connections between these locations and what the timeframe on these actions will be?

**Sitting suspended 1:02 pm until 2:06 pm.**

### *Motions*

#### **Health services**

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): Before lunch I was speaking to my health motion that talks about the failures by the Allan Labor government in delivering services – the cuts, the health mergers and amalgamations and the lack of consultation on this very important area – to communities. Last year when the amalgamations were starting to happen there was so much concern. I was out with my colleagues Cindy McLeish, Annabelle Cleeland and a number of others, and we were going around to communities speaking out in force against the amalgamations. Actually Roma Britnell is another one concerned in the western region of Victoria. Again, all of these communities came together, very concerned about the amalgamations, and I think we are seeing the consequences.

As I was saying, job losses are starting to occur, and despite the government's repeated denials of forced mergers, it is not just me saying it; there are other people talking about the concerns that they have around it. I refer to an article in December last year 'Shared beds, staff and radiology: the government's plan to cut costs in our hospitals'. It is a very telling article. It states:

Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association secretary Craig McGregor described the proposals as a "backdoor way of achieving hospital mergers".

He went on to say:

... he was concerned that consolidating radiology services would lead to job losses, particularly among chief radiographers with local knowledge of the workforce and patient needs.

He is quoted as saying:

It is potentially going to be a disaster ...

In the article another person is quoted as saying:

So many services will be provided centrally that it will impact small health services through loss of jobs and visibility of staff.

The article states he talked about workforce banks as 'nice in theory' but said they would not work because of the distances between hospitals.

Again I say we have seen that through the job losses with the linen services from Horsham to Ballarat – 2000 kilometres those workers had to travel each week on roads that are full of potholes. The government has ignored Victorian roads and regional Victorians for far too long. Those roads are dangerous, and we cannot fix them because the state is broke.

The Auditor-General's report today highlights the performance of major projects. On one of them it highlights the blowouts in the Frankston redevelopment. It has doubled in cost. It has been delayed. Every project this government does is delayed in time, and the costs all blow out. What is extraordinary about this report is the detail that the Auditor-General's office have gone through in having a look at these major projects. But what I find just gobsmacking is the minister responsible, Gabby Williams, attacking the Auditor-General, saying it is shoddy methodology and talking about other aspects of this

important report. I think that is just highly unnecessary. Talking about unprofessionalism, that is being unprofessional – a minister coming out and attacking this report.

Looking at the many issues with the Frankston Hospital redevelopment, as I mentioned, the original approved cost was \$562 million. It was not published. This figure was not published in the budget papers. Can you believe it? It was not published in the budget papers because there was no budget paper 4 produced in 2020–21. There will be some ridiculous excuse around COVID or the Ukraine war or Donald Trump – I do not know; they will blame someone. But the point is that this has now gone to \$1.12 billion. That is an increase of 99.3 per cent, or \$558 million. That money could be going to services in regional Victoria, and it could support our health services right across the system. It is an enormous amount of money. That is just one project that has blown out.

Of course, as we have seen, our state's debt is climbing all the time. I just do not understand why the government does not take this seriously. I just find it incredulous that they do not understand the impost they are putting on current and future generations of Victorians with the debt that they are going to be saddled with. Yesterday the Treasurer said that being the Treasurer was fun. What an insult to every single Victorian who is really struggling with paying increasing rates, land tax bills or payroll tax bills and their rising grocery costs, energy costs, car registration and insurance – all of these things. These are big impacts on the household, yet we have a government who are frivolous. I think it is extraordinary how they just disregard what is so important.

As that debt is climbing, cost cutting is inevitably going to have to happen. That will compromise patient care and lead to poorer patient outcomes. At the start of my contribution I spoke about that. The Labor government abandoned its promise to deliver 240,000 planned surgeries last financial year, falling dismally short by 30,000. That is 30,000 Victorians who are waiting for necessary surgery. They are in pain, they cannot see properly or they are reliant on painkillers to be able to function; there are so many implications. It is just terrible what is occurring. In the six months from July to December last year the waiting list for surgery in Victoria increased by 5400 patients – 5400 Victorians were added to that waitlist. From the quarter ending 30 June it went from 57,476 Victorians on the waitlist to, in December, 62,878. That is a lot of people that are waiting for vital surgery. It is that basic care that Victorians are being denied and do not have access to. It is these cuts to the critical services that are really having an impact on all Victorians.

I have spoken about dialysis, I have spoken about the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme and I have spoken about other areas. We know that Cancer Council Victoria is having an increase in people contacting their helpline because people cannot take the time off and take their loved ones to have their cancer treatment. Again, these are basic services. They are going to have to be travelling further. The maternity services have been slashed across regional Victoria. That is putting the lives of Victorian women and their babies at risk. We know that the services that have been cut in northern Victoria have led to some terrible outcomes – shocking outcomes – and we have got a government that just does not understand or does not care.

In the last few moments of this debate I want to again spell out the letters from the outgoing department secretary and the Minister for Health telling health services that basically there will be no further funding provided to their operating budgets. In August the situation was so dire that it led to a bailout – a Treasurer's advance of \$1.5 billion. That just shows the mismanagement between May and August – a couple of months – where the minister and the department secretary were saying, 'You've got no more money; live within your means. You'll be told your budgets, and you have to just comply with that.' Those people working in the system understood what was going to happen. It meant intensive care beds and NICU beds were going to have to close, dialysis chairs were going to have to close, cancer treatments were going to have to be scaled back and a whole lot of other services were going to be cut.

The demands have not gone away since last August, and now hospitals have only just finished – or I do not even know if they have finished – signing off their statement of priorities. This is in the lead-up

while they are trying to look at their targets and their funding for the next budget. I will say in closing that this is a government that is way out of its depth. We have got a Premier, a Treasurer, a minister and frankly an entire government who have got no clue about what they are doing. It is dire and should be taken very seriously that health services and our health system are in crisis, and under Labor it will only continue to remain that way. I urge members to support my motion.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (14:17): The government will oppose this motion. It is really a bit rich coming from the Liberals. Certainly they would know all about cutting critical health services. Just before I go on, it was Jeff Kennett who closed hospitals across the state and privatised even more. In my electorate Koroit, Mortlake, Murtoa and Macarthur all lost their hospitals, as did Clunes, Beac, Birregurra and Lismore. Those local health services were lost to the Liberals' slash-and-burn exercise. This is evidence that those opposite do not care. They are the complete opposite to caring, really. Our government and the Minister for Health have been very, very clear. We are committed to rural and regional health care, and our minister Mary-Anne Thomas is determined to strengthen rural healthcare services – and is doing so, and I will now explain.

What we are doing is creating networks that will support our hospitals and improve client care. In many cases we are backing in existing networks that are longstanding operational arrangements and systems across logical regions. I have a great example to tell of here this afternoon, and that is the south-west local health service network. I met with them last year, and this is a collaborative group of healthcare services across the south-west. Over the past two decades they have been building up an impressive network of integrated services to provide high-quality care close to home and within their own community. This network of hospitals in south-west Victoria has 27 geographically dispersed campuses, which deliver care to rural and remote communities within our region. The network includes Casterton Memorial Hospital, Heywood Rural Health, Moyne Health Services, Portland District Health, South West Healthcare, Terang & Mortlake Health Service, Timboon and District Healthcare Service – where I had my first child – and Western District Health Service in Hamilton. It also includes the five Aboriginal community controlled health organisations. This network is a very sensible arrangement for what is the tyranny of distance in our region.

Established clinical pathways within the region mean that the south-west has a self-sufficiency rate of 85 per cent. This means that the south-west region meets the clinical health needs of most of its communities over the period of their lives. This is shown by the fact that 98.6 per cent of patients who seek care in the south-west are treated in the south-west. Between them the hospitals in the network deliver 390,000 clinical consultations a year, 94,000 emergency or urgent care inpatients, 42,000 acute inpatient stays, 600 residential aged care beds and over 400 aged care packages. This is done with a workforce of 4000, including 165 specialist medical staff and a total budget of \$610 million. The network delivers surgical, obstetric, midwifery and emergency care across the region.

The network has achieved some absolutely remarkable successes through collaboration. They have already developed an integrated electronic medical records system used across all of the services, with a single unique patient identifier ensuring visibility and connection of care across all agencies. So when one of my relatives is in Timboon hospital and they need to be sent to Warrnambool for more complex care, the same medical record is used. Their practitioners and health providers can see their medical record. They do not need to retell their story, and the providers do not need to ring health colleagues to understand what is actually going on for that patient. That is convenient for patients and is best practice, and it is already in place for our regional hospital network. They are able to deliver coordinated services including integrated mental health and wellbeing services, cancer treatment, palliative care, stroke treatment and aged care. They also deliver allied health services, including continence treatments, speech pathology and smoking cessation, and they have built a centralised supply model and a shared integrated linen and logistics service.

I would just like to point out that \$50 million from the Allan Labor government was contributed to build a state-of-the-art logistics service for all of the hospitals in south-west Victoria and a supply department as well. It was very much a logical and sensible initiative by this network, backed in with

new money from the Labor government. They have a common medical credentialing system, so if you are accredited as a nurse at Timboon you are also accredited at Heywood. That makes sense as well. For the movement of staff around the region, there are no barriers and stops along the way. They save money and reduce their administrative burden through shared finance and payroll systems. This network has been voluntarily in place on and off in various different ways for decades. I know that for all of my life if I have a family member at Timboon they are going to be sent to Warrnambool if they need more complex care. There is a natural connection there. It makes sense. With the announcement of the formal network by the minister those relationships and structures will now be recognised and backed in even further by this government. So not only are we not forcing amalgamations, we are creating a health system that will enable our hospitals to do more for Victorians closer to home. Saying otherwise is really yet another attempt at fearmongering. It really is putting down our wonderful health system, which has really come up with its own solutions to a logical network environment.

There are further investments. The South West Healthcare stage 2 upgrade of the hospital is currently underway, and that is with \$384 million from a Labor government – this Labor government. That is on the back of money for the cancer centre in Warrnambool, which provides cancer services to the south-west region, also contributed by the Labor government. Stage 1 of the hospital redevelopment in Warrnambool was also funded by the Labor government. Rather than, as the Liberals suggest, mismanaging our health system, we have made strategic investments. Those investments have supported the natural networks and logical systems that our community has set up for health.

I want to close by saying that I really would like those opposite to stop running down our system and running down the nurses, doctors, allied health professionals, cleaners and caterers who run our world-class health system. The significant inaccuracies and falsehoods in this motion result in fear and distress in our community, a community that knows it is getting a strong and high-standard health service. The impact of this motion and the debate from those opposite undermine community confidence in our absolutely fantastic health system. I refer to your accusations of uncertainty: this is a construct of the coalition; the uncertainty is a construct of the opposition. This has been a campaign of fearmongering and putting signs up saying ‘Save our hospitals’. We were never going to close a hospital; we were never going to force amalgamations. In fact an additional \$8 billion into the health system in the last budget is evidence of our backing rural and regional communities. There is absolute logic to why we will not be supporting in any way this very, very negative motion.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (14:27): I am pleased to be able to speak on this motion put forward by the Shadow Minister for Health, Georgie Crozier. It certainly covers many of the issues that have been raised with me as I represent Northern Victoria. It talks about the Labor government’s failure to manage Victoria’s health system, including the amalgamation of health services across Victoria which will lead to a loss of frontline jobs, services and local community voice and to centralised decision-making. One of the core responsibilities of state government is health care, and when the system shows signs that it is sick it certainly reflects a bigger problem. It reflects a state government that cannot manage money and is failing in its responsibilities to manage Victoria’s public health services. This is far from fearmongering; it is simply sharing the reality of what we are seeing in regional Victoria.

We know that ambulance ramping is an issue, which shows that there are delays getting people into emergency. We have seen it at Bendigo, we have seen it at Shepparton and we have seen it at Wodonga. We have had a code yellow at Bendigo Hospital; nurses spoke out about being under pressure and unable to cope with the demands. We have seen stage 2 of Goulburn Valley Health yet to be completed. I know Kim O’Keeffe, the local member there and my Nationals colleague, has spoken out about that issue. We know that in Wodonga a bigger hospital to meet the demands of a growing population has certainly stalled. If we look at the emergency department wait times, recent statistics show that in Bendigo and Albury they are much worse than the state average. Then we have seen the broken promises of this government when it comes to hospitals. For Melton hospital there have been years of promises. In 2018 Labor vowed to build 10 community hospitals. Three have been

scrapped and most others significantly delayed. At Pakenham hospital – announced in 2018 – I think a fence has been going up.

There is a lot of work that still needs to be done, but this government likes doing reviews. They like to do review after review. They like to engage consultants; they like to kick the can down the road without taking practical steps to solve problems. They outsource problem-solving through consultants when they should be focused on improving actual frontline services. That is the role of a state government, to manage priorities, and this government is doing a very poor job. We see that our state debt, our net debt, is absolutely skyrocketing; it is fast approaching \$26 million in interest every single day. At the same time they like to pursue massive infrastructure projects like the Suburban Rail Loop. At this stage the Commonwealth has only given that just over \$2 billion, which falls far short of what is required. When you look at some of these priorities behind the scenes, last financial year the Suburban Rail Loop Authority's employee expenses were nearly \$58 million, so the Allan Labor government's \$200 billion Suburban Rail Loop is a gravy train. It has over 100 executives earning an average of \$322,000 each.

The Allan Labor government like to do big builds and they like big debt, and it is causing big problems, particularly in our health sector. The state government has slashed 75 per cent of funding from the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance. This alliance was allocated \$7.5 million in the budget, compared to \$32 million. More than 35,000 Victorians were diagnosed with cancer in 2022, and rates are much worse in regional areas. Also consider the important role of clinical support nurse educators at Bendigo Health. They work alongside students and provide guidance and feedback to help them learn. Now these roles are being removed, placing even more pressure on nurses, who already face a very heavy workload. The government has flagged changes – creating these local health service networks that come into effect on 1 July this year – but, as the shadow minister has highlighted today, there is not a lot of time left and certainly not much clarity over what this actually means and what the impact will be. A lot of health services have been wondering what is next. But we have seen that before under this government. There is not a lot of community consultation. They like 'consultold' rather than 'consulted'.

Our health system is under pressure. It is not to be underestimated how important it is to have access to emergency services. I was reading an article in the *Upper Yarra Star Mail* on Tuesday 11 February that shared the experience of Larry Norman from Yarra Junction. Late last year he collapsed in pain, suffering an abdominal aortic aneurysm, known as an AAA, where the main blood vessel travelling through the body is close to rupturing. His wife was told there was a 5 per cent chance of survival, but I commend the health staff and the team for their work: Mr Norman did survive to tell the tale. He spent 30 days in hospital, he came out just before his 30th wedding anniversary and he certainly thanks God for his survival. Mr Norman has highlighted the importance of emergency care in the regions, and there is a great shortage in the regions. He also highlighted that the mountain bike track – that significant investment in Warburton; there is going to be 160 kilometres of trails and just that huge boost to tourism – will also potentially contribute to some of the demand for services and support in that region.

Many residents are concerned about the lack of doctors in rural areas and concerned about urgent care. I spoke with a resident in the west who had an experience of severe burns. Attending a hospital where there is no doctor on hand to assist can be quite stressful when you are in that situation, and it certainly came through as I spoke to her about the desperate need she had to see a doctor at the time. I have spoken with many people about the importance of having GPs and medical facilities in regional Victoria. The needs are great, and it is hard to see an incredible amount of money being spent on other projects when there are areas in need of support. I know Bev McArthur has spoken about the Royal Children's Hospital and the importance of the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service at the Royal Children's Hospital. It is being quietly dismantled. That is having an impact on families in my region of Northern Victoria. They are very concerned about having continued access to that support service, because that service is the first and only one of its kind in Australia. Also, we have the Parliamentary

Friends of People Affected by Diabetes, and they have highlighted the need for investment in early intervention care for young adults with early-onset type 2 diabetes, because there is a gap there, particularly for 21- to 40-year-olds, that age group, and if not addressed that can have a significant impact on our hospitals.

There is concern about this government's failure to manage our health system and especially their failure to manage the state budget. I note recently it was announced that the state government has taken steps to delay the state budget until after the pending federal election. It was going to be on 6 May; now it has been delayed a further two weeks. I am sure some of the information that will come out of that will not put this government in a very good light. This motion speaks to the local health networks and their concerns. My Nationals colleague Emma Kealy has certainly highlighted the impact of an amalgamation of Grampians Health, which merges four health services. It has resulted in jobs being lost. It has had impacts on dentists in the region and on rehabilitation services. I have heard of people that had to travel a couple of hours for support services, and when you are someone with cancer, that is a very difficult situation to be in. We have seen rallies in regional Victoria. I know in Mansfield there was a rally of over 1000 people who raised concerns about the funding cuts and the mergers to health services. I commend this motion to the house.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:36): At the outset I just want to say that we will not be supporting this motion before us today, although there are a number of concerns within the motion that we do share with the opposition, and we can certainly relate to a number of the points that have been raised by those who have contributed to the debate so far. In particular on the subject of amalgamations, I think this is something – and I have spoken about this before – where we have seen a real failure of government to communicate effectively with both health services and the broader public about what the objectives of this process are. As such, I think there has really been a missed opportunity here to deliver reforms that would strengthen the health system and improve access to health services for many Victorians.

The situation we find ourselves in, with over 70 individual health services that do not really run as a cohesive health system, at times creates challenges when coordination is required. This was something that was really brought to light during COVID, when we saw numerous examples of challenges with coordination between hospitals. That has been well aired; I will not go over that again. But even in the day-to-day running of hospitals, the lack of shared pathology systems and providers, separate radiology providers who use different IT systems and different health record systems, all of these things impact on the patients who attend – whether different hospitals are providing their care or whether they are being transferred between hospitals.

Duplication and potential limits on the ability to provide clinical services occurs, given that each hospital has to manage its own resources and they are not sharing them between each other. This fragmentation that we see is really a legacy of the Kennett era, when there was the attempted privatisation of our health services. It failed spectacularly, but we are left with a largely decentralised model of health care. The answer to that is not necessarily fully recentralising our health system. It is not a panacea for these problems of lack of coordination. It is really important that our health services have the capacity to respond to local needs and, especially in rural and regional areas, that the services continue to exist even where it may be more expensive – there is argument about whether that is the case – to provide them in those areas.

It is warranted that we have a discussion about how there can be better coordination and resource sharing between health services. This is a welcome discussion; it is necessary. It is really what the recent public discourse around amalgamations could and should have been. But instead, a failure to clearly communicate the objective of these discussions and the unfortunate timing of these discussions – where they occurred adjacent to announcements about hospital budget cuts – created a significant and understandable fear that amalgamations were being looked at as a money-saving exercise. This meant trust was lost, with many health services and the broader community fearing that their services were going to be cut. This concern was felt deepest in rural areas, where the local health

service is often the backbone of a community. They not only provide the health care that is really, really important for community members – because they do not have to then travel long distances at great cost, in terms of both time and money, to access health care – they are more than that. They are more than just health service providers; they are employers. They are a key employer in a lot of small towns. They attract families to those towns who might have partners who work in other areas that are needed for the towns to remain viable, like education or child care.

What could have been a positive conversation about how we could share services to deliver more and better services to regional communities, improve coordination, improve safety and improve quality of care instead led to fear, uncertainty and a whole lot of rumours, which were really left largely unchallenged, to dominate the broader public narrative. Inevitably we saw the government retreat from their original plan. Now we have seen the announcement of local health networks in place of previous plans. Once again, this announcement should have provided an opportunity to outline a positive vision for our health system in Victoria, but to date this still has not really occurred. We still have many services and communities who fear that this plan around local health networks is going to lead to cuts, particularly given the widespread and well-known concerns about budget constraints in the health department.

If the government is motivated by a desire to save money, amalgamating or networking – or whatever you want to call it – health services is not actually the way to go about it. Evidence shows that amalgamations do not really save money at all in the short term. They might in the longer term, and that is more likely to occur with amalgamation of the large metro services rather than the smaller ones. So this is not going to be a panacea for any budget woes. In fact amalgamations or any kind of significant health system reform, certainly of this scale, require significant up-front investment to make the change work. It takes a lot of time, it takes strategic planning and it takes people to oversee and implement that change management.

There is an excellent paper that I would commend to the house that was published about the experience with the formation of Grampians Health. It makes this very clear. The amalgamation may have actually achieved many of its original objectives, so in that sense you might say it was successful, but the change management process was really poor. More time, money and oversight were needed as well as better communication, both within the health service and to the broader community. This might have actually helped to bring around greater acceptance and understanding of the changes.

The need for up-front investment in this change, particularly in the proposed local health networks, has been reinforced by a whole host of stakeholders, most recently to me by the Victorian Healthcare Association, who are calling on the government to ensure that the new local health networks are adequately resourced to undertake this change process, including with investment now – not once the changes already start, but investment now – to support work plan development. The new local health networks have the potential to generate real benefits like patient access and workforce sharing, but these will not be realised if the right investments are not made.

Effective healthcare systems inevitably cost money, and perhaps this is one of the major points of difference that we really depart from the opposition on. We believe that generally this is money well spent. We should be spending money on health care. Community health and wellbeing should be a foundational concern for governments, so if we need to spend more money on health care, that is a good thing; it is a good use of government money. However, there are methods of cost saving that are often overlooked by government. I have said this so many times, but I am going to take the opportunity again: investing in prevention, preventative health care, is the number one thing you could be doing to save money, if that is the objective. Every dollar invested in health promotion and prevention saves \$14.30 in healthcare costs. It is a no-brainer; we should be doing more of this. There are things like addressing junk food advertising, smoking harm reduction campaigns and perhaps considering something like a health trigger in the planning scheme so that local communities could prevent fast-food and liquor outlets being set up in their local areas.



The next best thing after prevention and health promotion is investing in community-based primary care. After prevention, this is one of the most cost-effective interventions that you can make. It provides prevention, early intervention and holistic support, and it keeps people healthier and keeps them out of expensive hospitals. What this means for the government is ensuring that they fund our Aboriginal community controlled health organisations and our community health services properly so that they can deliver the services that they need to for their communities but also expand on this model. Rather than opening more and more shiny new hospitals, invest in these incredibly valuable resources we already have in our communities – build more of them. We need more of these. Renovate them; fix them up so they can actually be functional. That is where the best value for money is found in health care, and it will save the overall health system a lot of money. But obviously that requires a holistic view of the health system, which I imagine is something that does not often happen. It is hard to account for the impacts of some of these things, but they are the things that will make a difference.

There are other initiatives around cost saving. I know that the AMA has been out promoting the GROSS program, which stands for getting rid of stupid stuff. It has been embraced by hospitals worldwide. This focuses on really getting health services to identify areas where they could save costs themselves. It does things like reduce duplicative training models: if you work at three different hospitals and have to do some form of the same training across those three institutions, couldn't there be some way of centralising that so your training is all standard – for example, your fire safety training or something else that is applicable across the different sites? There is clunky information transfer between clinics and hospitals that could be improved, and many other initiatives. It has been done in hospitals around Australia and around the world. It is not – *(Time expired)*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:46): I am pleased to rise to speak on Ms Crozier's motion in relation to our hospital system, a motion that seeks to critique some of the recent processes that have been underway with respect to health service administration but then also looks at the state of the healthcare system in some pretty strident terms. The government does not support the motion. I want to start by just reflecting on why health care and hospitals matter to Victoria and to Victorians – because having a world-class, highly functional healthcare system staffed by highly trained, well-paid professionals delivers all Victorians the peace of mind that they need to have so that when they get sick they have got some system there to help them and to support them.

Labor has always supported universal access to public healthcare systems in Australia. We have always been a party that has supported and invested in our hospitals and our broader healthcare system. That is why we have got a public healthcare system in Australia – because of Labor – and Labor is always going to stand up for our health care and our hospital system. And in Victoria, thanks to a sustained period of investment in our healthcare system, we have one of the strongest performing health systems in Australia and among some of the best in the world. I think anyone who has the misfortune of being sick knows that when they walk into a Victorian public hospital they are going to be cared for by highly trained professionals who want to give them the clinical support and broader care that they need.

We know, however, that those opposite – the Liberals – are more interested in fearmongering than they are in coming up with solutions that are going to deliver better healthcare options and better healthcare outcomes for Victorians. The Labor government is focused on figuring out ways to make our health system better. And we did that just the other day when in the other place new laws were introduced to enshrine more nurse-to-patient ratios in our healthcare system to strengthen the ratios that make sure that particularly in intensive care departments, for example, patients will receive appropriate care from highly qualified nursing staff. I am sure we will get into a very extensive debate when those bills come before this chamber, but that is just the latest example – I think it might have even been yesterday – or the next example of where Labor is investing and Labor is supporting our healthcare system.

Those opposite are just interested in talking down our healthcare system. When you take a step back from the distortions about our healthcare system performance that those opposite seek to peddle in

relation to the system, you can see that the health outcomes that Victorians are getting from our healthcare system are, generally speaking, world-class and nation leading. No system is perfect, and we know that. Our healthcare professionals, who work exceptionally hard, do their absolute best day in, day out to provide high-quality health care. I want to take this opportunity in this place to thank all of the healthcare professionals who work in our public hospitals in particular but in our broader healthcare system and thank them for what they do to deliver world-class health care here in Victoria. We have some outstanding statistics in terms of system performance, well ahead of the national average for cardiac arrest survivals. We are ahead of all other states in elective surgery waitlist turnover rate and the only jurisdiction, according to the report on government services from the Productivity Commission, that has treated all category 1 planned surgery patients within clinically recommended timeframes.

But we do know that despite there being good system performance here in Victoria, the system is under pressure. There is exceptional demand on our emergency departments, and that is resulting in a lot of pressure on the staff working in those departments and longer wait times. 500,000 patients presented for treatment at Victorian emergency departments between October and December last year and there was a record high in category 1 presentations. Despite the demand, the focus of our hospital system and our healthcare system, particularly our public hospitals, is on meeting this demand in a timely way, and the median time to treat in our public hospital emergency departments is now 14 minutes, which is 8 minutes faster than it was before the pandemic. All category 1 patients – category 1 patients being those assessed as being critically unwell and requiring immediate treatment – continue to be seen immediately on arrival in our emergency departments. There is record demand increasing pressure, but we have got an exceptional workforce backed by the resources that they need which is making sure that despite the increased demand those patients with the most critical need are being seen immediately upon their arrival to emergency departments.

We also know that due to what happened in the state during the pandemic there was a need to catch up for those Victorians that still needed planned surgery. The catch-up plan and the *Planned Surgery Reform Blueprint* invested \$1.5 billion in delivering more surgeries, reducing waitlists and improving the timeliness of care. Just under 50,000 patients were admitted for planned surgery between October and December last year, and 100 per cent of the most urgent surgeries were delivered within 30 days. There is continual improvement for category 2 and 3 patients, with the median time treatment dropping four days for category 2 patients and 31 days for category 3 compared to their equivalents in the year prior. Overall the percentage of patients treated on time continues to improve, with 86 per cent of all planned surgery patients now seen on time. That is the reality of what is going on in our health system – investments from the government; a workforce doing an absolutely outstanding job, backed in by the government, facing increased and increasing demand; and a system delivering the care that the most critically unwell patients need as soon as they need it. We are doing everything we can to make sure that other patients with less acuity on presentation receive their treatment and their surgery, for example, within reasonable timeframes.

On the question about the fearmongering in relation to hospital amalgamations the government has been absolutely clear that there will not be forced amalgamations of our hospital services. The continuation of the misinformation and fear is a disservice to the Victorian community – a disservice to the Victorian community to continue that scare campaign. I do not want to waste the time that we have to talk about how good our healthcare system is and to acknowledge the challenges that we face by continuing to give oxygen to the misinformation that is being perpetuated by those opposite, but we should always be looking at how to make our healthcare system more efficient and more effective, because what patients care about is the quality of care that they are receiving. They are not so fussed about the badge, the logo, on the top of the emergency department as they go through; they are absolutely critically focused on the quality of care that they are receiving. That is exactly why we have the sorts of performance measures that I spoke of earlier in the speech and why we have been investing and supporting our healthcare workforce the way we have – recruiting more nurses, supporting better

nurse-to-patient ratios and enshrining them in law. Ensuring that Victorians have access to high-quality healthcare when they need it has been a cornerstone.

**Nick McGowan** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** I am going to keep saying it, Mr McGowan, because it is both important and true that in Victoria Victorians should expect access to a world-class high-quality healthcare system backed in by funding and backed in by a highly trained workforce, and under Labor that is exactly what they are getting.

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:56): Well, well, well. What we have seen here today is an awesome exercise by a government that has clearly been there way too long, a government that has failed to heed a single, solitary message from the last two by-elections, and they were just days away, weeks away – two weeks away; my goodness. And yet here we have, waxing lyrical, time and again, one speaker on the other side after the other telling us how good we have got it. It is almost reminiscent of the days of Keating. Remember Keating? ‘It doesn’t get any better than this’ – remember that quote? That was from the Labor Party as well – in the midst of a recession. And yet here we are today in the same state, in the same country –

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Say that again, Mr Batchelor? Repeat it again, Mr Batchelor? Okay. You do not want to repeat it; that is fine. It is amusing to me that all those opposite do is replay. They are the same old messages: if you tell people long enough they have got the world-class best medical health system in the world, that is what they will believe. The sad reality for those opposite is that Victorians have been engaged with the healthcare system for years now, and they know that, sadly, despite the best efforts of the practitioners, despite the best efforts of the nurses, despite the best efforts of all those individuals, including paramedics, who try and save lives and treat Victorians, this government has monumentally failed, absolutely failed, and for those opposite to suggest otherwise is absolutely ridiculous. They know it is ridiculous for them to use words like ‘fearmongering’. This comes from a party, do not forget – a party – who could not lie straight in bed. They could not.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Nick McGOWAN:** That is right: not only did they do a Mediscare campaign – your party, Mr Batchelor, and if you want to go down the path of history, I am happy to do that with you – but their brand has consistently lied to the Australian much less the Victorian public about health care. They have consistently used it as a weapon with which to hit Victorians over the head time and again. The Labor Party do not cease to actually scare the people of Victoria into voting one way or the other, because –

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Nick McGOWAN:** I will pick you up on that interjection, Mr Batchelor, talking about hospitals and closures. The reason that my good colleague here Ms Crozier is bringing this motion forward today is because she has every right to be concerned that those opposite are planning forced closures, forced mergers.

*Members interjecting.*

**Nick McGOWAN:** I listened to you too, Mrs Ermacora, and I will come to you in a moment. I will give you just one example: 2018. Who wants to go back to 2018 in this chamber? Not many people, I am guessing. But I can see Mrs Stitt is smiling. So perhaps, Minister Stitt, you and I can go back there; we can go on that path together. Back in 2018 you were here, so you will understand this: the Labor Party at the time had a press release – remember this, boys and girls? – headed ‘An emergency department Maroondah kids and their families can count on’. Has everyone gone silent? My goodness,

have they what. I will repeat it: 'An emergency department Maroondah kids and their families can count on'. They said that in 2018.

**Georgie Crozier:** 'Ten community hospitals,' they said in 2018.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Ms Crozier, once again you are 100 per cent right: 10 community hospitals. Coming from the claptrap opposite, coming from the very people who want to decry the Liberal brand, while they themselves as a Labor brand promised 10 hospitals –

**Ryan Batchelor:** You shut them down. You privatised them.

**Nick McGOWAN:** You promised one, Mr Batchelor, right here in Maroondah, and what did you do? Tell me what you did. You did nothing. In 2018 you promised the children of Maroondah, so that is Croydon – that is further afield than Croydon – it is Ringwood, it is Warrandyte, it is Blackburn, it is Vermont, it is Forest Hill, it is Nunawading, it is Mitcham and it goes further than that. I could continue. So to all those constituents, where is your apology? Where is your apology, Mr Batchelor? You have fallen quiet all of a sudden. Minister Stitt has also fallen quiet all of a sudden. She is the Minister for Mental Health in this state. She is supposed to give a damn, and right now all she is doing is speaking to Mr Batchelor, because what they know is they ought to apologise for their craven, disgraceful tactics and for their lack of funding hospitals. Not a single cent of the \$64 million they have actually identified – do not ever forget that; I do not know where that money went, Ms Crozier, but \$64 million –

**Georgie Crozier:** The black hole of the Suburban Rail Loop.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Yes, to the Suburban Rail Loop – it is down the tunnel. It will be great when the meteor arrives, because we will have a tunnel to climb into. That is what the Labor Party plan probably is.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Nick McGOWAN:** If it doesn't go down a sinkhole in the meantime. In 2018, I remind those opposite – that is what they promised the people of my district. That is what they promised, and they never, ever delivered. They did not even try. \$64 million blown – goodness knows where that went. But it got better; it got much better than this. I only wish I had half an hour, an hour, 3 hours, perhaps all day, because I could keep going on. Then 2022 comes along. What happened in 2022, Mr Batchelor? I ask this as he leaves the chamber. In 2022, guess what, there is another media release. We know the Labor Party is all spin and no substance. You should know this. You will learn. Stick around, whippersnapper; you will learn.

**Tom McIntosh:** Who are you calling a whippersnapper?

**Nick McGOWAN:** In this place those opposite like to talk about 'grasshopper' and 'sensei' and all sorts of other things. I am just using language I hope you understand. I am just trying to make it language that you would comprehend.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Nick McGOWAN:** A union hack? Well, I am more generous than that. But nonetheless in 2022 this press release – this was a zinger, and I do not mean a burger from KFC – said:

The new Queen Elizabeth II ...

*Members interjecting.*

**Nick McGOWAN:** Queen Elizabeth II, Minister Stitt. Did you have a hand in this? I hope you did not. I really hope you did not.

The new Queen Elizabeth II hospital will rebuild and refurbish the Maroondah hospital from the ground up.

From the ground up. There are two problems – well, there are so many problems I do not know where to begin, but I will begin with the obvious problem: not once did this government bother to think or consult the local people about the name. Then what did they do? They stumbled. They spectacularly stumbled before they even got out of the blocks. The starting gun had not even gone off. Had they bothered to have one modicum of respect for the people of my area or one modicum of respect for Indigenous Victorians, they might have thought they should consult on the name prior, because Maroondah is an Indigenous name. It is an Indigenous name, Minister Stitt. I know you have to leave us now – that is a real shame – but I wish you would stay to hear this out, because you will be sitting at that cabinet table. There are people in my area that have mental –

**Ingrid Stitt:** Stay in your lane.

**Nick McGOWAN:** I am in my lane well and truly, I can tell you that. But what I would like to see is funding for the Maroondah Hospital, not zero dollars, which is all you have in the forward estimates. It is an absolute disgrace. Everyone in this chamber should be absolutely appalled with themselves, particularly those at the cabinet table. I am glad that you have joined us now. We have gone from one cabinet minister to the next. Unfortunately, the Treasurer has stepped out of here as well. Member Ermacora, do not go away too, because I have picked up on some of your comments as well. You were talking about fearmongering –

**Georgie Crozier:** Here we go. We've got Enver in charge. Enver's in charge.

**Nick McGOWAN:** That is exactly right. We are losing some ministers here. I go back to your Queen Elizabeth II hospital. So you single-handedly alienated and disrespected the entire Indigenous population of Victoria by overnight declaring it the Queen Elizabeth II hospital – because you never asked anyone, because you never realised Maroondah was an Indigenous word. I mean, how stupid. I do not use that word often and I apologise for that word, but how stupid can you get? How stupid. Of all the things they have ever done, I have never seen the Labor Party actually take a step so fundamentally wrong as when it came to Maroondah Hospital, and they are insisting upon it. Do you know there is an online petition? I looked at that before I came out here today. There is still an online petition. How many signatures are there? There are just 56,000. That is all. It does not matter. Who looks after the petition? That is right:

This petition was originally started by Maroondah Action and transferred to Assembly of First Peoples' of Victoria

This is how hopeless you mob are. You could not get the name right; we have established that. Number one, you could not get the name right. Number two –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Nick McGOWAN:** Ms Crozier, those opposite are not interested in patient outcomes. I think we have established that.

**Georgie Crozier:** That terrible, terrible situation in the Maroondah emergency department, Mr McGowan.

**Nick McGOWAN:** You raise a very, very valid point, and before my time is up I should raise that too. Time and again, despite their best efforts, they have been failed and let down by this government. Those opposite, time and again –

**Jacinta Ermacora:** On a point of order – your first, I think, Acting President – just for clarity, I did not take my husband's name when I got married, and I refer to myself as 'Ms', not 'Mrs'. I am offended to be called 'Mrs'. I note that I just checked with Minister Stitt, who was also referred to that way – she is also 'Ms', not 'Mrs'. I do feel little bit offended when I am called 'Mrs'.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** I would ask that members of this house do refer to people using correct terminology.

**Nick McGOWAN:** I refer to the media release at the time. This is from Jackson Taylor – Mr Jackson Taylor is who it is from. This is his quote from the time when he talked about the Queen Elizabeth hospital. Keep in mind, everyone here, that there is not a single cent in the forward estimates for it – not a single cent. He says:

Queen Elizabeth II –

it is not even called that, but that is what they have called it –

holds a special place in the hearts of Victorians.

Really? Well, we know that, but you have just given it no money for decades. That is fine.

A re-elected Andrews Labor Government will rebuild and expand the Maroondah Hospital before renaming it in Her Majesty's honour.

That is all good and well for Her Majesty's honour. That is fine; I accept that at face value. But I tell you what, having not actually committed a single cent, there is a larger question at stake here and that is what I will conclude on today. There not a cent in the forward estimates going forward – not one single cent – for a so-called rebuild at Maroondah Hospital. And despite that government – that is your government, those opposite me, the Labor Party – promising in the order of \$1.05 billion, we have not seen a skerrick of it, not a cent, not a little squirrel nut, nothing. We have seen nothing. My point is this: they still will not guarantee that that hospital will be rebuilt on the same site, so still hanging over the heads of all of the locals in my area is the very real prospect that they actually may have a closure of the Maroondah Hospital and it will be forced to go to Wantirna. That is completely unacceptable.

**Tom McIntosh** (Eastern Victoria) (15:07): I will probably speak on behalf of all of us; I am glad the last contribution ran out of time, because that was surely something. I would like to return to the motion here. I will speak against it. Rather than ranting and raving and shouting out people's names and shouting out people's names incorrectly and giving a running commentary on who is or is not in the chamber or is leaving the chamber, I think some simple facts might help present the chamber with who is strong on health and who Victorians trust to deliver a world-class health system. I can absolutely tell you that I am proud to be part of a party for which a fundamental value is the health system for all Victorians, whether that is our newest Victorians entering into a birthing suite or whether it is caring for our oldest Victorians in a dignified way, where they and the people caring for them are in a world-class system.

I am not sure where to go first. There are the higher figures and numbers that identify the success of the health system here in Victoria, but I might put that on hold for a minute and first come to the local infrastructure investment, because I think that is really important. We had a few comments from the other side during the debate. They talked about investment in regional Victoria, and that is something that I am absolutely delighted to stand up here and talk about. When you walk through the development for the Orbest aged care home at the hospital – \$45 million – it is underway. What that means to people, to families, to the community – for locals to be able to age where their family is, where they are connected to people, where they have lived, where they know people and where they can be visited is so important. To be able to ensure that the local workforce in smaller rural towns can work in a state-of-the-art building is absolutely so important and so valuable. In Maffra a \$70 million aged care home is to be delivered for that community, similar to Orbest's. There are the investments that we have made in the Latrobe Regional Hospital – \$217 million – and in the first stage of Wonthaggi Hospital, \$115 million. These make a real difference to communities and they make a real difference to the workforce – keeping people working in our rural towns and keeping people working in the health workforce in our regions.

Not only have we delivered the infrastructure to ensure that our patients are being seen by a workforce in first-class facilities, we are also giving that workforce the pay and the conditions through the 28 per cent pay rise to nurses and midwives and through the ratios. We know when the coalition were last in power they went to war on the pay, the conditions and the ratios of our health workforce – of our

nurses, of our ambos – because they fundamentally do not believe in lifting the economic conditions of workers. Their public policy position is to suppress the wages of workers.

It was only last week that I got to tour with the Minister for Health Infrastructure and a number of other local members from Frankston, Hastings, Carrum and Cranbourne the incredible \$1.1 billion hospital at Frankston. The birthing suites, a whole floor of new mental health support – the peninsula and the south-east will benefit from this incredible health investment, and much like other investments we have seen in other places around the state, this investment is just incredible for locals.

I want to touch on a visit which was really special to my heart. For most people this will not be something they have ever heard of, but at the remote communities of Bonang and Goongerah last year I got to visit the bush nurses. In some of the halls that have been set up in particular for bushfire recovery as emergency shelter and relief places there are suites where our bush nurses can come in and, through the HoloLens – which is an incredible piece of technology; basically a pair of glasses they can put on – they can engage with specialists in Melbourne to save people making a 6-hour each-way trip and basically doing two days of travel to go and see a specialist. A specialist can now, through the eyes of a local bush nurse, observe and in some cases treat patients. In the event of snake bites or other issues someone can be supported locally by expertise out of some of the best hospitals or by some of the best experts in the world. It does not have to be Melbourne; indeed it can be anywhere in the world. The fact that we are putting this technology in these spaces and backing some of our most remote residents is really important.

I also want to touch on our ambulance service. I have been able to visit the new ambulance stations that we have put in in Foster, in Yarram, in Paynesville and in Mornington. We have got new stations in Moe and in Orbost. This is again coming back to the health infrastructure investment that is supporting our workforce who support us. If you go out to a local community and talk about who some of the most trusted workforce are – sadly for all of us here it is probably not the people in this building – it is our nurses and it is our paramedics. Local community absolutely love, value and respect the work they do. Again, that is why I am so proud that we invest in the infrastructure. We have set up the pay structures that are ensuring that they are well paid and that our nurses are recognised for the inequality in gendered pay historically. We are catching that up and ensuring that people who do so much for our quality of life at our time of most need are paid and cared for appropriately.

It would not be right of me to stand here and talk about all the investment in health infrastructure that the Labor government has made, and it would not be right of me to talk about the investment that we make in our workforce pay and the ratios and the work conditions they have, without looking at the alternative government and their history, what they have done and what they will do.

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** On a point of order, Acting President, I do not think that this is an opportunity for the member to be attacking the opposition. We are not in government, and so we need to keep this to the motion.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** I ask the member to return to the message of the motion.

**Tom McINTOSH:** I will talk about a hypothetical world where there is a party that exists in this state who have ambitions to become the party of government – a party who have closed hospitals. Growing up in regional Victoria, I spent a lot of time down Warrnambool way, Koroit, Mortlake. I do not know what Mrs McArthur thinks about Macarthur hospital being closed. I played footy up at Clunes, Beac, Birregurra, Lismore, Elmore, Eildon, Red Cliffs. The privatisation of Traralgon – to have all these hospitals closed. I have maybe once or twice mentioned the removal of services, the removal of train lines, the shutting down of schools that occurred under this lot's watch.

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** On a point of order, Acting President, again I would like to ask you to draw the member back to the actual motion. This is not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Mrs Hermans, it has been a lively debate. I ask the member to continue.

**Tom McINTOSH:** I will stand on our history of investment in infrastructure, in pay and conditions, in ratios and in supporting the health workforce to support Victorians. I will remind Victorians to look at the history of those opposite, to look at the alternative government who want to have their hands on the levers and what they will do. We know that their economic policies are to suppress wages. They will go after the wages of our healthcare workforce. History tells us they will shut hospitals, they will privatise and they will see the health care of this state go down the toilet.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:17): I also rise to speak on Ms Crozier's motion about our health system, which is absolutely falling apart. I commend this motion because it discusses so many of the issues that are important to Victorian people. But before I start, I also wish to thank all of our healthcare providers, our healthcare professionals, particularly our nurses, our doctors, our ambulance workers, everybody across the sector that is working tirelessly to do their very, very best under very difficult circumstances in this state to provide health care – the very best health care that they possibly can provide under the circumstances – to the Victorian people. May I say that the enormous anxiety and stress that this is causing healthcare providers because of decisions that are being made by this government are untold, and this government needs to take seriously the sorts of things that the opposition is bringing into the chamber when it talks about health care. Our job as opposition is simply that: it is here to hold the government to account. We would not be doing our job if we were not doing that, and so this motion is doing exactly that.

Let us just start by the way it opens. It condemns the Allan government for failing to manage Victoria's health system. I cannot wait, in terms of talking about how it has failed, to see the results of the inquiry into Ambulance Victoria's workplace culture. That is going to be a real concern, because we know a number of things. There have been I think more than 60 submissions lodged in this inquiry, and annual reports show that the agency paid out a record \$108 million in WorkCover claims for the year – \$20 million more than in the previous year. These are genuine concerns about a broken healthcare system under this government. We have also got the inquiry looking into things like ramping and the toll that it has taken on many Victorian lives and those many more that have been endangered. These are serious issues. They matter to Victorian people, they matter to the everyday Australian and they certainly matter to the people of the south-east, who I represent. I say that there are genuine stories of concern, actually heartbreaking stories, of people who have barely, narrowly got out of the situation that they are in in terms of being able to get to the hospital in time, and in some cases that has not happened. So I offer my condolences to the many families who are grieving because our health system is broken and they have lost loved ones in the process.

I want to go on to talk about the loss of frontline jobs, services and local community voice. These are all realities. To say that this is not happening is to say that you have not travelled out into regional Victoria and spoken with healthcare professionals. They talk about the issues of the resources with this being suddenly closed, that being closed, there not being enough for them to use in these regional hospitals. It is a major issue for Victorians and it is a major issue for our healthcare professionals, and they are finding it an incredible struggle to provide quality care to the average Victorian.

There are so many additional things I want to talk about. I can see that I am going to run out of time, but let me just talk very quickly about some of the financial results of this government. This should give you an idea of how disastrously and how badly things are really going. Monash Health covers Casey, Frankston and Dandenong – perhaps not Frankston, but it covers a lot of the south-east. They had a net loss of \$321,278,000 compared to an operating profit of \$23 million-plus last year. That is how badly it is going. The loss is masking the fact that some of their assets were actually revalued. What on earth is that? How can you be revaluing in order to hide your figures? That is pathetic. State government operating grants have decreased from \$2540 million in 2023 to \$2346 million in 2024, which is a 7.7 per cent decrease. That is how badly things are going in Victoria.



**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:22): I cannot help but bring to the attention of the house the frivolous and ridiculous points of order raised by Labor members in a very important health debate about their concerns around whether they are going to be called ‘Ms’ or ‘Mrs’. That is how Labor treat the seriousness of the situation that Victorian health services and Victorian health practitioners and clinicians are facing – and importantly, Victorian patients. I find it absolutely extraordinary that their trivialisation of this motion was laid bare through their contributions.

We also had government members going back in history around things that happened last century. They failed to even put into context what happened in terms of the situation Victoria was in. The Cain–Kirner years sent this state broke – well, we are here again. How things change but stay the same. I want to go back to the issues this motion is about: the cost cutting and the issues. My colleague in the other house Ms Cleeland brought up an adjournment matter around maternity services being cut:

A lack of funding support from this government has already resulted in providers like Benalla Health having to close their birthing services, and Kilmore health’s maternity ward operating on reduced hours between 6 am and 6 pm.

The hospital recently lost 30 midwives from their staff and are still dealing with a hiring freeze and a lack of resources following the Department of Health’s directive to contain costs. That is cost cutting, whether it is that maternity service or whether it is the dialysis units being cut, the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme, the lack of support for patients or the motion that is going to be debated next about the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service at the Royal Children’s Hospital. Mrs McArthur will speak to that. I have spoken about that. I have spoken to patients and I have spoken to clinicians. As a direct result of cost cutting, that is what this government is doing. When you fail to deliver a proper and manageable budget, invariably services will have to be cut – important services that affect Victorians. That is what has happened with maternity services, patients in renal failure who require dialysis, support for patients with cancer treatments and all these vulnerable children and their parents who are seeking the support of a nation-leading service. These issues are important. They are right across the board. Ms Ermacora defended the government’s situation and having workers travel 2000 kilometres a week when they are working in linen services. This is the result when funding is reduced and services are squeezed.

Amalgamations are going to happen. Now the government is saying amalgamations are not going to happen. Mark my words, health services will fold because the funding is being squeezed time and time again. There was a reprieve last year with the \$1.5 billion Treasurer’s advance, after it was highlighted by CEOs and COOs that services would be cut to meet the financial demands of the Minister for Health and the department secretary. But unless that funding is reinstated and continued, then services will close. The maternity service’s 30 midwives have gone, and that is in a small area of Northern Victoria. This is the reality of what we are speaking about.

I heard Dr Mansfield speak about elements of this, and she was agreeing with my motion. Yet it is disappointing that they are not bold enough to actually stand up and support this when they also know what is happening within our health system. Victoria’s health system is in crisis, whether it is our hospital system, whether it is our ambulance system or whether it is the morale among our wonderful clinicians that are doing tremendous work under very trying circumstances. The occupational violence is having a massive impact. I say again that this is an important motion, which has been trivialised by the government, and I would urge all non-government members to support my motion.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (15):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (20):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah

Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

### **Colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (15:34): I move:

That this house:

- (1) acknowledges that:
  - (a) the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service (CPRS) at the Royal Children's Hospital is a world-class, patient-specific surgical, nursing and allied health service that provides comprehensive and innovative care for children and their families affected by anorectal malformations, Hirschsprung disease and chronic constipation;
  - (b) CPRS provides specialised outpatient clinics including nurse-led bowel management, stoma therapy, and a psychology clinic to support families in reducing the psychosocial impacts;
  - (c) the increasing number of patients treated by CPRS alleviates a significant burden on other health services in Melbourne and regional Victoria, as they lack the expertise to handle complex colorectal conditions;
- (2) notes that the:
  - (a) CPRS is the first and only service of its kind in Australia and has had measurable positive impacts on the physical and emotional health of children and families;
  - (b) false economy of removing the direct and continuing wraparound care would inefficiently offload responsibility to unprepared emergency departments and healthcare providers;
- (3) expresses concern over reports from patients and families indicating that CPRS in its original form will be shut down imminently;
- (4) recognises the philanthropic support for the establishment of CPRS in 2020, which could be jeopardised by any reduction in services;
- (5) calls on the:
  - (a) state government to ensure CPRS continues in its original form to support children and families; and
  - (b) Minister for Health to liaise with the federal minister for health to ensure the funding and future of this vital program is safeguarded indefinitely.

Bridget lives in my electorate near Warrnambool. This is her family's story. At 40 hours of life Sidney was airlifted to the Royal Children's Hospital due to a severe bowel obstruction. After spending a week in the neonatal intensive care ward he was diagnosed with Hirschsprung disease. Hirschsprung is a congenital condition that occurs when the nerve cells in the lower part of the bowel do not form properly. If these nerves are missing, it can cause partial or total blockage in the lower part of the bowel. At six months old Sidney underwent pull-through surgery to cut out the section of his bowel that had no nerve endings. Sidney spent the week in hospital recovering. Surgery has not cured Sidney's disease but has just made it more manageable for the time being. Bridget said:

In the ... months leading up to his surgery, we performed bowel washouts twice daily, often more. Managing this, with two older children and no medical experience, while living 3hrs from the RCH, was extremely stressful and traumatic. The support of the CPRS –

that is, the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service –

... was crucial. Many times, I relied on Suzie or Jess for guidance over the phone, walking me through each step of the process, providing reassurance, and helping me feel confident in those overwhelming moments ... The thought that this kind of assistance may not be available to other families in similar situations is heartbreaking.

Since his surgery Sidney has faced several setbacks. He has had hospital stays for issues like chronic diarrhoea and severe nappy rash, and he has been closely monitored for infection of the bowel. Bridget said:

... our son is one of the lucky ones, who at 2 years of age is currently blissfully unaware of his disease. However as parents, we are filled with fear for Sidney's future ... The thought of losing the support of the CPRS team is deeply distressing ... It's difficult to imagine how we, or other families in similar situations, would cope without that vital support.

We are surely all in this place to make the lives of Victorians better and especially the most vulnerable in our community: seriously ill children. The colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service, the CPRS, at the Royal Children's Hospital was developed by Professor Sebastian King with philanthropic funds in 2019, including from the Kyle Sheldon Memorial Fund and the Hickory Group. It was recognised that there was an unmet need for colorectal patients and their families, especially with regard to wraparound care for nursing and allied care coordination. The service was then enhanced significantly by a five-year grant from the federal coalition government in 2020.

The CPRS brought together existing surgical expertise with specialised nursing support, stomal therapy, psychology, social work, child life therapy, dietetics, care coordination and research. The team provided support from the moment babies were diagnosed with a new anorectal malformation and required emergency surgery at one or two days of life; support for families with a new diagnosis of Hirschsprung disease, a condition that almost no-one in the community had heard of, with parents needing to be taught how to wash out their new baby's bowels; support for parents conducting daily anal dilatations of their children; and support for the families of children who had been constipated and soiling their underpants at school or who for the first time had answers and solutions for why their child was affected with this crippling condition.

Almost as important as the support itself has been the unifying effect on families. For the first time they have come together and found a voice. They have come together in a community, including at family barbeques, where parents meet and share stories and where moments of connection change children's lives as they see that other children are affected by these conditions and look just like them. On Sunday I had the pleasure of attending a family CPRS barbeque and I met many families who told me their incredible stories. Some had flown from Tasmania. Some had caught a train from Albury at 5 o'clock in the morning. Some of these families are in the gallery today: Nasra and her son, for example; Anthea and her daughter Milly and her brothers Sam and Tom; Cassandra; and my daughter Sarah – also a Hirschsprung patient – and our grandson Edward, another Hirschsprung patient. In fact he is a CPRS devotee.

Nasra's son was born in 2018. After four devastating weeks not pooing or eating he was diagnosed with Hirschsprung disease. Nasra managed bowel washouts for a few months until his pull-through surgery. At eight months of age he became constipated and bloated with constant infections. Bowel washouts were recommended and botox procedures undertaken to alleviate his withholding. At three years of age he had a stoma formed. Nasra was back and forth to the hospital with her son, but Jess and Suzie, the CPRS nurses, were always available on the phone to help her decide whether to come to emergency and then come and meet her and her son once admitted. Thinking about the closure of the CPRS, Nasra said:

It is scary to lose Jess and Suzie.

She described them as the bridge to the rest of the CPRS team, saying:

They feel your emotion and understand your body language.

Nasra is Somalian, and English is her second language. To explain her son's medical history to a new person every time they seek medical advice is daunting. No-one else in her community has this condition. It is isolating and has been a long journey for Nasra with no social circle that understands what she is coping with. Nasra's son loves soccer. She wants him to be a normal child with a normal

life. The CPRS team have helped him do that so far. But without the CPRS Nasra feels she has lost everything. ‘Who is going to help us?’ she said.

The vision of CPRS was to provide holistic, wraparound care for patients and their families affected by rare colorectal conditions that are not easily discussed in public; to be there for families as they go through some of the most difficult moments of their lives as they see their children require multiple invasive but life-saving procedures; and to provide a service that patients and families deserve, with specialised nursing, allied health and care coordination. It is care that has led to reductions in hospital stays, allowing families to be home sooner and in their own environment; reductions in the number of visits to the hospital for appointments, with improved coordination of care and multidisciplinary clinics; and reductions in presentations to regional hospitals and to the emergency department of the Royal Children’s Hospital.

Rachael is from Rockbank in my electorate. Her son was first introduced to the CPRS when he was three weeks old. He was diagnosed with a rare condition called LUMBAR syndrome, which includes anorectal malformation. During his first year of life he endured three major surgeries, five hospital admissions and countless clinic appointments. Rachael has been a nurse for over 15 years in both the private and the public sectors. She has never seen a service that supports children and families like the CPRS. Rachael speaks as a professional, and she knows how good the CPRS is and how important it is. Rachael felt her son was not just a name and unit record number at the CPRS.

Most importantly, it provides continuity of care. That is the key to its effectiveness. It is why it works for families, it is why it provides better outcomes and it is why it saves money. Why is the CPRS different? Well, the CPRS is one of the few truly multidisciplinary paediatric colorectal services in the world and certainly the only one in Australia. Victoria should be shouting from the rooftops how good this is. The service cares for patients from every state and territory as well as assisting children from around Asia and beyond. Its worldwide reputation is clear.

Marc Levitt, chief surgeon of the paediatric colorectal and pelvic reconstruction division at the Children’s National Hospital, Washington, DC, recently wrote to the Royal Children’s Hospital. He felt compelled to share an international perspective on the invaluable contribution this program has made across the world. Dr Levitt runs a sister program in Washington, DC and frequently collaborates with the CPRS team at the Royal Children’s Hospital on both academic initiatives and patient care. He described the CPRS program as a model of paediatric colorectal care which has significantly benefited countless patients. He notes there is a critical need for a regional referral centre that concentrates expertise and improves patient outcomes for these rare conditions. The CPRS has successfully, he says, filled this role, and it was the first and remains the only recognised centre of its kind in Asia. It is also just one of two programs in the Southern Hemisphere, the second being in Johannesburg. He goes on:

I often speak of your program as a global model, highlighting the extraordinary commitment of both the institution and the Australian government to support the infrastructure necessary to provide exceptional care to this patient population. We try hard here ... to follow your example. The success of such a program, from a financial and clinical standpoint, underscores the importance of concentrating resources and expertise in a single center. Your approach –

that is, the Australian approach, the CPRS approach at the Royal Children’s Hospital –

leads to better outcomes ...

And isn’t that what every program should deliver – a better outcome? It also delivers reduced morbidity, fewer hospitalisations and fewer emergency room visits, while our emergency rooms are overloaded as it is. If we can avoid attendance at emergency units, we have made a difference – results that have been well documented and published internationally. Dr Levitt says:

I for one, am a better surgeon because of your team’s efforts.

Believe it or not, there is a Royal Children's Hospital strategic plan – we love strategic plans – and the CPRS clearly aligns with it. The CPRS is internationally recognised for its research, befitting the RCH's position as a leading paediatric academic hospital. Secondly, it is an integrated paediatric service. The CPRS has worked with providers across the state and beyond to support families in all situations so that they may receive care close to home. Thirdly, healthy children in the community are part of the strategic plan. The CPRS has worked with kindergartens and schools across Victoria and elsewhere to ensure that all colorectal kids are treated with respect and kindness as they enter new and challenging environments. The CPRS fully supports the vision of the Royal Children's Hospital, a world where all children thrive.

So what has happened? Since last year the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service has lost the allied health and care coordination expertise created over the last four years. In addition there has been a reduction in stomal therapy support and the imminent loss, any week now, of the specialised colorectal nursing support. These reductions in staffing have been acutely felt by parents – new families unable to access the psychological support they so desperately need, delays in clinic appointments due to the loss of care coordination and an inability to contact the specialised nursing supports that have been essential to families staying out of the emergency department and avoiding hospital admissions. And all the while the hospital has said, 'It's business as usual.' The chief of surgery told families in a letter only last Friday that the Royal Children's Hospital will deliver ongoing care for patients in a manner consistent with that delivered for other patients at the RCH with complex and long-term surgical conditions.

This is simply not good enough for these children. The CPRS has proven it is possible to provide them with world-leading care. Why go backwards and reduce patient care to the lowest common denominator standard? All care should be raised up to the best possible standard. CPRS sets the model all patient care and allied health should aspire to. The Minister for Health said the RCH has assured her the quality and level of services to families will be maintained. Well, I am sorry, Minister; that is simply not true. You are being misled. You only need to ask the parents, some of whom are here today. They can tell you the services provided have fundamentally changed for the worse. As Annelise from Adelaide has told me, the staff layoffs to date have destroyed the ability of patients' families to directly contact and seek urgent support from the CPRS clinical teams. Advice from inexperienced staff and those not familiar with their children can be extremely detrimental to their health.

Greg Ryan OAM was born with anorectal malformation 60 years ago and was a patient at the Royal Children's Hospital for 20 years. He is with us today. He can personally attest to the significant physical and psychological challenges that individuals face with this lifelong condition. Recognising the urgent need for specialised community awareness and support, he established the One in 5000 Foundation in 2017. For Greg and others it is unfathomable that the Royal Children's Hospital would choose to dismantle this crucial service after only five years despite the immense investment, dedication and irrefutable success of the program. Greg launched a change.org petition on 7 February which already has 4300 signatures. Thank you, Greg, for your unstinting support for the CPRS and for the children who are so disadvantaged by this congenital condition.

So why is it important to support the ongoing funding of the CPRS? As the Treasurer said yesterday in this chamber, health is the number one priority. Well, Minister, the CPRS should be your number one priority. These children are vulnerable, fragile and in need of consistent expert care. Colorectal conditions are still largely taboo in the community. There are over 1000 patients currently using the CPRS. They have lifelong care needs and are rarely recognised. This can significantly affect their mental and physical health. The psychological impact of soiling your underpants as a child is devastating. Many CPRS patients will need to wear nappies to school and be constantly anxious about having an accident.

What is clear is that the CPRS provides a level of care that all children with colorectal conditions need and deserve to thrive. With this support they will be far more likely to be able to function healthily as

adults. The CPRS model of care should be celebrated not dismantled. It should be replicated across other sectors of the health system. I urge you to support the motion.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:54): I rise to speak on Mrs McArthur's motion on safeguarding the future of the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service, CPRS, program at the Royal Children's Hospital, the RCH. The essential care provided to children with these complex colorectal conditions at RCH is vital to our state. We as Victorians should be proud to be the nation leader in health care and healthcare services. I want to thank my colleague opposite, Mrs McArthur, for bringing this motion to the chamber today. I also want to note her genuine interest in this important matter, a matter that affects many in Victoria. I also want to begin by stating that the government will not be opposing this motion.

A child born with anorectal malformation, or Hirschsprung disease, has a condition for life. Despite reconstructive surgery, these children may suffer from lifelong health issues which have the potential to significantly impact upon their quality of life. In 2019 the service received federal government project funding. This funding was used to deliver improvements that have had a long-lasting impact on the model of care that the Royal Children's Hospital delivers. This has so far enabled them to provide families with not only the surgical care their child requires but ongoing support in terms of their nursing and psychosocial needs. The Royal Children's Hospital has always provided exceptional care to patients with these conditions. I feel confident that there are no cuts to the outstanding level of surgical care and wraparound services that the Royal Children's Hospital currently provides, and I am sure that there will be no changes to the quality of core medical care that patients with complex colorectal or pelvic conditions receive.

Community health and safety is a priority of this government, and our history shows it. This motion sets out some very important elements. It acknowledges that:

... the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service (CPRS) at the Royal Children's Hospital is a world-class, patient-specific surgical, nursing and allied health service that provides comprehensive and innovative care for children and their families affected by anorectal malformations, Hirschsprung disease and chronic constipation.

It also acknowledges that:

CPRS provides specialised outpatient clinics including nurse-led bowel management, stoma therapy, and a psychology clinic to support families in reducing the psychosocial impacts ...

And that:

the increasing number of patients treated by CPRS alleviates a significant burden on other health services in Melbourne and regional Victoria, as they lack the expertise to handle complex colorectal conditions ...

And I agree.

Victoria's health system is one of the best in the world, and that is thanks to this government. In 2019–20 the Royal Children's Hospital received \$481.38 million from the Andrews Labor government to do what they do best – provide the world-class care that children need. Patients travel from all across Victoria as well as from other Australian states to access the Royal Children's Hospital's well-renowned services. But we know we cannot rest. An independent expert advisory committee was established in 2023 to consider how to improve access to our health services for all Victorians. To provide a solution, the committee developed a health service plan. The plan recommended more collaboration and connection between services by creating local health service networks, and because the Allan Labor government is about putting patients first, that is what we have done and what we will continue to do.

The health services plan released in August 2024 sets out our government's vision for a better connected, easy-to-access health service for Victorians, delivering Victorians a better connected health system backed by record investments, one that ensures patients get the care that they need sooner and in their own communities. The Allan Labor government have made a record investment of more than

\$21 billion in the Victorian budget in 2024–25. This will help health services meet increased demand, deliver more planned surgeries and support the dedicated workforce. This will be achieved through key pillars of reform. The establishment of local health service networks will group health services with geographical regions. These will be responsible for delivering better care as close to home as possible. This will ensure that the planning and management of care meets the population's health needs in their communities. The networks will enable health services to work better together to deliver more accessible high-quality care for Victorians. This includes coordinating clinical services and attracting and retraining a skilled, well-equipped workforce. The networks will aim to deliver a system that is easier to navigate, with more consistent pathways between hospitals, better and more consistent support of our valuable health workforce and less duplication of administration so that our hospitals can focus on what they do best, and that is caring for patients.

Each health service will keep its name, its local leadership, its own identity and its connection to its community, but they will collaborate in a network to provide greater access to services closer to home. This means that expertise will be easily shared across the region. Additionally, the formalisation of relationships between a majority tertiary, a women's and a children's hospital will support better access to high-complexity care and expertise. This will ensure every Victorian has seamless access to specialised care and expertise when they need it. The Victorian role delineation framework will support this collaboration across the system by setting out the roles and responsibilities of every health service site as aligned to their size and capability. These reforms will deliver even better care by supporting health services to work together and ensuring local voices are heard. This comprehensive and multidisciplinary care model in Melbourne is world leading.

Just last year we delivered record investment across the system to all hospitals, including the Royal Children's Hospital. For them, that meant investing \$56.4 million to expand the existing emergency department, and it meant delivering a new 30-bed inpatient unit at the Royal Children's Hospital. This expansion helps meet the increasing demand through the expansion of acute paediatric beds and emergency department services, and this first stage of the expansion is already treating patients with a range of different illnesses, including cancer. These services are designed to strengthen collaboration between the integrated team of health professionals, including nurses, psychologists, social workers, child life therapists and care coordinators. This enables all care and support that patients and their families need as they grow and eventually transition to adult services to be provided together in one place. We have shown that we will continue to back our nurses, our doctors and our paramedics, and we have proven we will back them with the funding that they need.

We have provided our hospitals with more funding than ever before to treat more patients than ever before. We have made record investments in the state's healthcare workforce, including through our scholarships and our \$32 million trainee GP program to cover the costs of study as well as the recruitment of more than 3000 overseas doctors, nurses, midwives and other health professionals. Alongside that record investment in our doctors, nurses and paramedics we are also investing in building new hospitals. We have provided the most significant investment in our public health system in this state, a far cry from those who privatised our hospitals. Our \$20 billion investment into our hospitals in 2024 alone proves our dedication to providing our health services with the funding that they need – the funding to deliver the care and services that the community expects.

We have delivered an uplift in the price of every health service in the state because that is what our health services asked for, and we are the government that listens. Clearly our world-class health system is built on a decade of consistent investment in hospitals. We know that Victorians deserve nothing less. We know that they deserve right now, in the right place and at the right time a world-class health system. Providing this standard of health care has become more challenging since the pandemic. We know that every cent invested in health is absolutely justified, especially when it comes to the health of our great state and of our great community. Costs differ for a range of complex reasons across the health system, and as the Minister for Health pointed out in November, reasons include patient acuity, labour costs and statewide specialist services, but this government does not cut corners when it comes

to health, and it absolutely does not cut corners when it comes to health spending. These investments have had and will continue to have measurable positive impacts on both the physical and emotional health of children and families across the community.

Victoria is a place where everyone can and should feel protected. This is why it is important to commit to the safeguarding of the long-term future of healthcare systems, and as long as a Labor government is in power we will strive to ensure the utmost care for our community under the jurisdiction of the state. At the forefront of our health system reforms and investments are Victoria's patients and staff. This government has introduced a range of measures over its time in office to ensure this. Let me be clear that the government is doing the vital work that needs to be done to support our vulnerable children and families in need and to keep Victoria's health system running at full strength, and we will continue to do so for many, many years to come. I thank Mrs McArthur for her motion.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (16:04): I too rise to speak in support of the motion that Mrs McArthur has put forward today and really thank her for the genuine thought that has gone into the motion, and I also acknowledge the stories that she has shared of people who use this service. I thank those people for allowing those stories to be told. I think it is really important that we hear those stories in a place like this, because it humanises what can sometimes be talked about in an abstract sense, so I very much appreciate the contribution that you have made to this debate. As Mrs McArthur outlined, this clinic was established in 2019. It provides services to children and their families from not only across Victoria but southern New South Wales and Tasmania and has supported over 1000 families in the past five to six years. As has been outlined, it provides wraparound services, including dietitians, psychologists, paediatric surgeons, nurses and care coordinators, and provides services for people with anorectal malformations, chronic constipation and Hirschsprung disease, amongst other conditions.

I can tell you that these are very challenging conditions that not only cause significant stress at times for the children who are affected but also for their caregivers and for others who are involved in the children's lives, like educators. They can be associated with significant stigma and lack of understanding from many, not just in the general community but also sometimes within the healthcare community itself. When you live with a rare condition, it means that often you find yourself having to explain things again and again. Typically people will be much more of an expert in their disease than many of the healthcare professionals they encounter, and that can be a challenging situation to be in. I recognise that there are many conditions that exist where a dedicated service could be of value – something similar to the CPRS – but they do not all get one. I think Mrs McArthur put it perfectly: that does not mean we should bring everyone down to that level. We should be aiming for that quality of care. In the case of the CPRS, we had clinicians who were willing and able to establish this dedicated service, and for a time, the appropriate funding to support it. They managed to get it up and running, and it became a globally recognised service, as has been well aired.

I also recognise that, as has been said, the families who access this service will still receive care from the Royal Children's Hospital, as I understand it. In no way do I want to diminish the quality of care that they might receive from a general service provided by the Royal Children's Hospital. They provide outstanding care, but we do know that having a collaborative care model that brings together those specialist skills and that knowledge and provides a wraparound, multidisciplinary model of care, particularly for rare conditions, has a very strong evidence base for delivering better outcomes. It makes complete sense that this would be the case. If you have a relatively rare or a complex chronic condition, for example like Hirschsprung disease, most clinicians or even general colorectal surgeons might only see a handful of cases of this in their lifetime. If this condition is all you treat, or you treat a lot of cases of this, you get very good at developing care models and an understanding of these conditions. Many of these conditions also have a genetic component – we have heard a bit about that – which means multiple family members may be affected, and having a trusted specialist nurse or care coordinator who knows not only the condition but your family well is so invaluable in these situations. I think we have also heard that when you have a wraparound service like the CPRS it helps to foster a



community connection. It reduces the isolation children and their families who experience these conditions can otherwise feel, and as we have heard, they can be very challenging to live with when you are surrounded by people who do not necessarily understand what you are going through.

The CPRS is not the only model of care like this that exists in Victoria. We actually have a number of these sorts of services that exist for other conditions. I could name a load of them, but obvious ones are things like the cystic fibrosis unit at the Alfred. We have got various transplant units at different hospitals. When I was a medical student and then a junior doctor at the Austin Hospital they ran a chronic liver disease service, and I can tell you it made a huge difference to have a dedicated service. We had people, clinicians from all different craft groups, who had a deep knowledge in these conditions. They knew all the patients, they knew their families, and they were available to assist when something came up. You did not have to run around five different people who had not heard of the patient or the condition. They knew exactly what to do. It was really valuable. It has been even more valuable in my work as a GP when someone comes in with a chronic, complex or rare disease who has one of these sorts of services where there is wraparound comprehensive care. If they have a dedicated care coordinator it makes a huge difference. If they come in with some sort of complication, I can immediately contact that person who knows them, who knows what to do, who knows how to get me in touch with the right people straightaway rather than having to make the general call via switch to whoever the registrar on call for the day is, who maybe has never heard of the patient. It makes a huge difference for the kind of care that you can provide for that patient.

I have heard from a range of different stakeholders about this particular issue before us today. I have heard from both families who are affected and clinicians who are concerned about the transparency around decision-making. I have heard that they have received different messages about what is happening with the service and why it is happening and they really fear for what is going to happen with the ongoing care that is provided by the CPRS. I will acknowledge as well that the CPRS may not have been a direct initiative of the state government and that the state government may be limited in their capacity to direct a health service to do something. What patients and service providers are looking for is some advocacy. They really just want some advocacy support on this issue. This is a really important service that is being provided, and for that reason I think it is something that I would implore all of the chamber to get behind today. That advocacy is something that the state government is well placed to provide, and I look forward to them not only providing that advocacy but hopefully seeing the CPRS continue to receive the funding that it needs and deliver the great care that it does for those many families who rely on this important service.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:11): I am proud to stand and support this motion today in Mrs McArthur's name. I want to acknowledge her incredible advocacy and passion for this unit and I also want to acknowledge the amazing families and children that are in the gallery today. Thank you so much for being here. Today it is my great honour to read a story of a mother whose child has Hirschsprung disease and has received incredible care from the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service (CPRS). This is her story. Tara is a young girl who has Hirschsprung disease, and her mother put together these words:

Our daughter Tara couldn't pass meconium within the first 24 hours of her life. She was transferred to the Royal Children's Hospital by an emergency vehicle. I never felt so alone in my life as that day. It was even worse this time since we lost our first daughter during the delivery.

Tara was diagnosed with Hirschsprung's disease after two most grueling weeks filled with shock and fear. Over her first year of life, she underwent four surgeries, a time filled with uncertainty and fear as we struggled to understand the disease. BIG THANK YOU to the nursing and surgical CPRS team! The doctors saved my daughter's life a couple of times. However, despite the main unfortunate events, the nursing and allied health team was our lifeline during this period, providing us with support that helped us grasp the medical details of the disease and guiding us through each step of our daughter's treatment. We needed someone constantly to tell us more and more information as we felt lost.

I would call the CPRS team every week for 11 months with countless questions, and their patience, dedication, and expertise were a source of comfort to us. They always took time to answer our concerns,

offering medical advice and emotional support that brought a sense of calm and peace into our lives. During our numerous hospital stays, often once a month, they visited us more frequently and stayed as long as needed. We took counseling sessions and had several dietitian appointments, we even had a great relationship with stoma nurses who taught us how to handle and take care of our daughter's stoma. Therefore, the whole team worked with us in order to succeed together towards better health outcomes. Although hospital visits are never ideal, we are grateful to the CPRS team because they turned them into a positive experience as much as possible, with their optimism serving as a guiding light during the tough times.

While we are deeply grateful for the care the Colorectal and Pelvic Reconstruction Service team provided, we are saddened and concerned by the hospital's decision, as we fear that the quality of care may not meet the same high standards without the familiar faces who have become like family to us. With the constant care of the CPRS I did not need to re-explain Tara's medical history to new medical staff every time I had a question.

She said:

Every time i emailed or called the CPRS team they already spoken to each other and exchanged the information about my daughter for instance.

English is her second language, and she said:

This helped me a lot since i didn't have to explain my situation all over again.

That is pretty powerful. I remember when I was a new chiropractor and I was working in Sale I saw a little child with Hirschsprung disease, and I never forget what the mum said to me. The mum said that when they first had their baby and they did not know what was going on, it was the most traumatic time of their life. They were not sure what was an unsettled baby and what was a serious issue. I remember that she said to me, 'We went from a place of complete panic to a place of complete peace.' And that really stuck out to me, because like Dr Mansfield said – I am verballing her – there are so many different conditions, but it is good to go to a place where that is what they see every day. They know this in depth, and it is specialist care. I want to acknowledge the incredible work of those teams and the peace that it brings families that are really going through a terrible time.

I have another story. This one is from Alex and Hughie, who are in Newham at the base of Hanging Rock in regional Victoria. Their middle child Hamish, who is 10 years old, was born with Hirschsprung disease. This is Alex's story:

His initial treatment and care was delivered by the RCH general pediatric surgery team and whilst we have no complaints about the lifesaving surgery and initial care he received in his first 18mths, that is where it stopped. After his initial care, we essentially had to find our own way in managing his condition.

Hamish only has short segment Hirschsprungs, there are certainly worse versions of the disease, however Hamish's story shows the impact the introduction of the CPRS clinic has had to not only the sickest kids, but also those who are likely to be missed and put on the low priority list now that the clinic has closed. I fear that low priority cases like Hamish, once they get through the initial surgery will be pushed to the outer, forgotten about and not provided with the unique and specialised support the CPRS have for all patients, not just those with critical care needs.

Prior to the CPRS, Hamish was ... incontinent. Whilst his initial surgery went well, the outcome was that he suffered from chronic constipation resulting in him soiling himself up to 3–4 times a day and overnight. He would go through good patches where he was fine, and then have a few weeks of soiling. At this point we were not in the surgical teams care, we had been pushed out to 12–18th check up appointments only and left to try to figure out how to help Hamish by ourselves. We dragged him around from GP, to a local dietician, a chinese medicine specialist, googling things ourselves and no one being able to give us any answers. As Hamish was soiling himself, everyone suspected that he had lost muscle definition, storage space and/or sensation in his bowel and could not 'hold on'. No one knew that it was actually due to the complete opposite – constipation.

One of the issues with bowel disease and constipation is that trialling new management options takes a long time. We spent nearly 2 years going from place to place, repeating our story to new clinicians, trying to get our child ready to attend school and not be faced with the embarrassment of soiling himself in public. He suffered the mental impacts of this – refusing to take medicines, refusing to sit on the toilet, behavioural issues and an aversion to medical intervention.

Right before Hamish was due to start school a family member who also has a much worse form of Hirschsprungs let us know that the CPRS had been formed. We paid out of pocket for a private referral to see Dr Sebastian King in his private rooms and from there he could refer us in ...

This was life changing. All of a sudden we were speaking to a team that knew what Hirschsprungs was. In our first appointment we were put on to laxatives, which we had never considered before. The team got to know Hamish, they coordinated appointments with a psychologist to assist with the refusal and behaviour issues and continued to monitor him regularly. A gastroenterologist also joined our care team to further investigate exactly what was and wasn't working in what was left of Hamish's bowel.

As I mentioned, these things take time. But when I had questions and issues with medications and trying to get dosages right I could just text or email the nursing team – they would get back to me within a few hours to discuss medication changes or behavioural priorities. I didn't need to wait for appointments, we could just find the right solution for our child without traumatising him any further.

The result – Hamish is now socially continent. He attends school without anyone knowing he has a disease. He can attend school camp (with support). He is in swimming squad! He is growing in confidence and enjoying a 'normal' life. If the CPRS was not formed, I suspect he would still be soiling himself at school, refusing to go to school and be a very sad child.

The CPRS has given us everything. A socially happy, well adjusted child ready to thrive and achieve ... in life.

Hamish has 2 uncles and 2 cousins with differing versions of Hirschsprungs. Our family genetics seem strong in passing this disease on. I worry for my future grandchildren, nieces and nephews about how they will ...

know how to care for their children if this support is lost. Alex said:

I hope this helps you to understand the depth of care the CPRS has provided and the life changing impact it has. Not only does it support the critical care of high need patients, but it catches those that sit on the border – those without life threatening issues. It provides them with a better quality of life, where otherwise they may be forgotten.

I commend this motion to the house.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:21): Earlier today in another debate I commented on priorities of things that we discuss in this place. This motion that we have before us today is exactly the sort of thing that we should be debating, and I am very privileged to be here today to make a small contribution. I would like to especially acknowledge Mrs McArthur for her heartfelt, passionate advocacy on this issue for her family and for so many others who have had to deal with some incredibly, incredibly difficult medical situations, whether through Hirschsprung disease or others. I would also like to take a moment, Acting President Bourman, to acknowledge that you very kindly gave up your general business slot today so that Mrs McArthur could raise this motion, and I am sure I speak for many in this place when I thank you for that.

We are very, very blessed to have an institution such as the Royal Children's Hospital in this city and in this state. It is truly, truly world class. Often when it comes to discussion of medical matters and scientific matters we talk about how Melbourne is one of the top three centres in the world for medical and scientific research – up there with Boston and with London and Oxford. It is a record and a legacy that we are very proud of, and the work that is done by some amazing doctors, nurses, other scientists and support staff at places like the Royal Children's Hospital so perfectly epitomises that. The colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service is another such marvel that we are blessed to have and one that I, until relatively very recently, was not aware of. As Mrs McArthur's motion said, it is:

... a world-class, patient-specific surgical, nursing and allied health service that provides comprehensive and innovative care for children and their families affected by anorectal malformations, Hirschsprung disease and chronic constipation ...

and it –

... provides specialised outpatient clinics including nurse-led bowel management, stoma therapy, and a psychology clinic to support families in reducing the psychosocial impacts ...

The motion also talks about the benefit it has for our broader health system in reducing added burdens from patients having to navigate extensive processes if they did not have this clinic. But I think the

critical point that really resonates with me and I am sure with everyone in this place is the impact that it has on those who suffer from one of these conditions or who have children who do and the way in which it turns what is already a very difficult situation from being an unfathomably difficult one to one that can be managed and one in which we can support all of our children to thrive. The difference that that makes surely cannot be quantified. We have families in this place today with lived experience who have come from near and far, and I would like to acknowledge each and every one of them as well. I had the privilege of meeting some of them earlier today, including Anthea and her children Milly, Sam and Tom. They are constituents of mine from the south-east, and I am so privileged that they were comfortable to share their story with me today. Milly is a very special young lady; she is hiding from us now. She has personally benefited from the CPRS over the past four years. Anthea told me how she and her husband struggled for so many years to seek the right answers and to seek the right support. A few years ago they discovered the CPRS, and it was transformative.

With Anthea's blessing, I would like to share some excerpts from a letter she has sent in support of this cause. Anthea says:

The experience that we have had and the improvement in the quality of both our daughter Milly and our families life as a whole after having an appendicostomy with Dr Sebastian King and his amazing team has been more life changing than you can imagine.

To hear of the changes happening and the removal of team members from the department is very concerning, devastating actually.

my daughter Milly and our family were lost for some 7 years in a medical world that knew nothing about her condition, she was a little girl that had the world at her feet and was unable to participate in it until she crossed paths with the CPRS Team at RCH.

The CPRS is a world leading medical department as is a necessity.

for the kids that finally have somewhere where they feel that their medical needs are looked after and FINALLY FEEL SAFE.

We are very privileged to have the voices of Anthea, Milly and their family here with us today. For their family and for so many like them both in this room and beyond this room and of course for the many families who are yet to come on this journey but who will, it is my personal, very sincere hope that the CPRS will continue for many years to come.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (16:27): I am delighted to rise to speak on Mrs McArthur's motion 810 on the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service at the Royal Children's Hospital. This service is vital in providing care for children suffering from anorectal malformation, Hirschsprung disease and chronic constipation. As Mrs McArthur's motion says, the CPRS is world leading and the first and only service of its kind in Australia.

Families who rely on this service are deeply concerned by reports indicating that the CPRS in its original form will be shut down imminently. Cost-cutting measures due to lack of funding by this government are putting the health, safety and mental wellbeing of children suffering from these conditions at risk. This is completely unacceptable. How can they justify shutting down such a vital service and offloading the responsibility of care to unprepared emergency departments and other healthcare providers? Aren't our emergency departments already overcrowded, understaffed and underfunded? Yet again this government is proving its inability to manage the health budget. All they seem to do is cut, cut, cut and put more pressure on our already stretched health systems.

Mel is a mother who resides on the border in Albury-Wodonga in my electorate. She has two young girls, Lucy and Hannah, who were both born with Hirschsprung disease. This is Mel's story:

For my eldest Daughter, Lucy's diagnosis, the Colorectal and Pelvic Reconstruction Service team did not exist, we were entirely dependent on regional services who were unqualified and inexperienced in caring for patients with Hirschsprung Disease. Around 9 of Lucy's first 12 months were spent hospitalised, with the majority of those hospitalisations being unplanned and involving Regional Emergency Department admissions, many of which resulted in air transfer to The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne ...

For our youngest, Hannah, the need to access an Emergency Department, was significantly reduced by having access to the CPRS team, because the team were able to provide satellite support, additionally, the need for Hannah to be transferred to RCH at times has been circumnavigated, because staff from the CPRS service have been able to provide additional knowledge and recommendation to our regional networks, resulting in more time spent together as a family, and less time travelling interstate to services, with an overall benefit to Hannah's wellbeing and minimal impacts medically, in terms of potential medical trauma.

I anticipate that with the changes to the CPRS service, we will now need to return to accessing our local Emergency Department services, especially in afterhours situations where most of Hannah and Lucy's concerns present. For Hannah in particular, living with an ileostomy ... means that she is at a greater risk of life-threatening dehydration and other associated health concerns. I think we will likely access our ED services, at the least, every second month, there may even be times where this increases to monthly or weekly, costing tens of thousands per admission, and I would anticipate that many of those ED admissions would also result in airlifts, I do not know what a regional paediatric airlift costs, however I know for certain that it is in excess of \$25,000, meaning that it is likely that our family alone will cost the state services in excess of \$100,000 in care in the coming 12 months, and this care does not include access to regional services such as GP's, Paediatrics, Dietetics, and Psychology services. It also not does it include the services which do not exist in regional settings, such as support from Social Workers and the essential services of Clinical Nurse Consultants and their wealth of patient specific knowledge. Forcing already underfunded regional services to shoulder the burden of the changes to this service, to me, seems an absurd mismanagement of health funds, and will only result in restrictive access to services for our family.

We are passionate about the ongoing support of the CPRS team, the service is world class, patient specific and has provided measurable outcomes for our family, and enhanced our entire family's quality of life. Families and advocates are already monumentally fatigued by the ongoing management of complex colorectal conditions and the management of impending changes at RCH has resulted in significant anguish for our family, and others. We do not know where to go without these services, they do not exist anywhere else in Australia.

I fully support Mrs McArthur's motion 810 on the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service at the Royal Children's Hospital and commend it to the house.

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:33): It is a great honour today to rise in this place and also support Mrs McArthur's motion and in particular support the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service (CPRS) at the Royal Children's Hospital. I also implore Minister Shing to make sure that at the next possible opportunity at cabinet she raises this precise matter with her cabinet colleagues and the Premier.

Today I will not speak directly to this motion. Rather, I will use the words of one of those mothers who is impacted and has had the benefit of the service at the Royal Children's Hospital. Ashlea Fox is mother to young Sinclair. Sinclair was rushed to surgery at only 26 hours of age. This is Ashlea's story:

After Sinclair was born, the paediatrician examined her. He spent a while examining her "bits" before moving on to other tests. He concluded that Sinclair was healthy, but he was concerned about her lack of anal opening and asked if she had passed meconium, which she hadn't. Sinclair was then taken to the special care ward, given a nasal tube, and sent to Monash via –

helicopter –

when she was just 4 hours old.

I was contacted 2 hours after Sinclair left, informing me that she had arrived at Monash. I drove there the next morning, less than 24 hours after giving birth. The doctors suspected Sinclair might have a fistula and tried to open it but had no success. At 26 hours old, Sinclair went into surgery, but there were no available operating rooms on the children's side, so I had to walk as quickly as I could behind the nurses as they took Sinclair across the hospital to the adult surgery area. They found no fistula, so a stoma was created during the surgery. The day after surgery, when I returned to Monash, the nurse who had been by Sinclair's bed left to help another family try breastfeeding, leaving me standing by my newborn, fresh out of surgery, unsure how to get her out of the cot/warmer to feed her. I asked staff for help, but I was told the nurse was "busy" and it wasn't a priority.

Due to the surgery, Sinclair's mucus fistula was overactive and outputting a lot of mucus. However, the Stoma team only worked limited hours and didn't cover weekends or public holidays. Sinclair needed bag changes every 3 hours or less, which was distressing for her. The nurse assigned to Sinclair was new and often said

she didn't know what to do and needed help. For 3 days, no one was available to assist with the stoma management and bag changes. The day before the public holiday weekend, the team left me with various materials and told me to "experiment" to find what worked. There were no specialists for her condition, and a doctor came to review Sinclair, mentioning her next surgery and telling me she needed to "hit the books and do some research" because he hadn't encountered her condition before.

After being discharged from Monash, I had a meeting with Professor Sebastian King at Royal Children's 2 days later. I maintained constant communication with Sasha, the colorectal coordinator, to get Sinclair in as soon as possible. When we arrived, Professor King immediately provided me with an A5 lever arch folder containing specialized booklets on Anorectal Malformation, outlining each step of Sinclair's journey and explaining her condition in more detail, which wasn't offered at Monash. He also asked Sasha to arrange for Stomal Therapy to meet with me before our meeting was even finished, ensuring I felt comfortable with the stoma management after hearing about my experience at Monash. Sasha followed up with emails to check on Sinclair and offered to help with any questions. Sinclair was placed on the waiting list for anal reconstruction surgery in May 2024 (category 2), with her position around 160. Any concerns I had were quickly addressed with a phone call or an offer to meet in person. The Stomal Therapy team consistently went above and beyond, solving any issues over the phone, via email, or by coming in for reviews.

Since September as staff was let go and reallocated to other departments the replies have been harder to get, I just spent 2 weeks calling the theatre wait list to find out when Sinclair's surgery would be. Originally was told 4–6 weeks in May 2024, then in December we were told Feb 2025 MAYBE March 2025 at the latest. Now after calling and calling and leaving messages finally have been told Sinclair is pencilled in for surgery in April, more than likely on her birthday and that I should be excited to give her an anus for her birthday (I guess instead of her first birthday party).

Instead of anal dilations on a baby who doesn't move much, I'll now be spending 3–4 months maybe more doing anal dilations on a 1-year-old who wants to move, roll and run away. I've already been informed that there is another big wait list for stoma reversal so that could be another year, and she is not allowed on that waitlist until after her first surgery.

My entire life is on hold, having more children? Would that be unfair to Sinclair because the attention she'll need?

My husband is American, we cannot make plans to travel internationally because I can't leave the country with Sinclair as we're awaiting surgery.

We thought we would have a specialised team if we had any issues or concerns. Now what?

Toilet training? What would that look like? What do I now have to consider for Pre-Kinder?

The only answer I get now when I voice my concerns to the dismantled CPRS clinic are "Parents are resilient and they have shown us new things all the time."

I commend this motion to the house. I thank those who have added to this debate today, and in particular of course I would also like to pay tribute to Ashlea and Sinclair for their forbearance and for their determination. Of course for the care of her loved one, I hope this matter is resolved swiftly.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:40): Thank you for the opportunity to rise today to speak on the motion brought forward by Mrs McArthur regarding the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service, CPRS, at the Royal Children's Hospital. This is an important matter, and I take the time now to acknowledge Mrs McArthur's sincere interest in ensuring that children and families affected by complex colorectal conditions receive the best possible care. Can I also take a moment to acknowledge all other fellow members who have made a contribution and joined so sincerely in sharing the stories and the lived experience of those in our community.

What this motion does is it speaks to and acknowledges the world-class nature of the CPRS, the benefits it provides to patients and to families and the need for certainty around its future; calls on the state government to continue the CPRS in its original form; and urges the Minister for Health to liaise with the federal government to secure its funding. It is worth noting for the chamber that I am a member for Northern Metropolitan Region, and that includes the Royal Children's Hospital. So can I take a moment to acknowledge the extraordinary leadership, research and delivery of world-class health services right there in the Northern Metropolitan Region. I am enormously lucky to have it essentially at the end of my street. This is an enormous privilege and one that I do not take lightly. I know from being around my community that people come from all over Australia to enjoy the

world-class services of the Royal Children's Hospital, and in fact some of the most complex cases are even international cases. I know because I hear those helicopters that come in and land at the hospital.

Can I just say too that I want to outline that the Allan Labor government is entirely committed to health care, particularly for children, and the services it provides, and clarify the current and future status of the CPRS. It is a highly specialised patient-specific surgical, nursing and allied health service, providing care for children with complex conditions such as Hirschsprung disease, anorectal malfunctions and chronic constipation. It really is unique in Australia, and it provides crucial support through outpatient clinics, nurse-led bowel management, stoma therapy and psychological support. This holistic approach ensures that children not only receive medical treatment but also the necessary allied health support to improve their quality of life and overall wellbeing.

I do not have the lived experience of Mrs McArthur when it comes to Hirschsprung disease, but can I take a moment to acknowledge the incredible complexity when it comes to stoma therapy. It is something that I have experienced, not with my own body but in caring for a very loved one who was the beneficiary of some stoma therapy. I tell you what, it is an extraordinary development in medical science. Can I also acknowledge and thank all the workers that make it possible, the folks that come out to our homes and the folks that patiently sit with us and explain what it is that we need to do to replace stomas, because it is not an easy thing to do. As we have heard the complexity of all these conditions being shared here in the chamber, I would also say that it is a lot for a family to learn. These are not things found in the mummy blogs or in the books; these are really complex treatments for your children, and it takes a lot to stretch yourself and learn these things. So can I just acknowledge all the parents that have gone through an enormous journey to learn about these, because I remember learning about stoma care and thinking, 'This is the most complex thing ever.' I learned about it and fumbled along the way, but the patience of the nurses and the care professionals was something that I will cherish and remember always.

I also just want to go back and acknowledge that the CPRS is so critical in that it alleviates pressure on other healthcare services in Victoria, particularly emergency departments, which are not equipped to manage these complex cases. By keeping the CPRS fully operational we are preventing the unnecessary diversion of cases to less specialised facilities – because these are incredibly specialised treatments; I cannot say that enough – and ensuring the best outcomes for affected families. The impact on this service is clear: it has transformed the care available to children with complex conditions, providing them with specialist treatment that improves both their physical but also their emotional health. We absolutely recognise the importance of maintaining high-quality paediatric care, and to be clear, we fully support the principle that children with complex medical conditions should receive world-class treatment at the Royal Children's Hospital, as indeed they do. The Royal Children's Hospital has a long history of treating paediatric colorectal conditions, and this care will continue. The CPRS model was initially funded through a one-off federal grant. Many of the improvements will have some really long-term benefits here in Victoria, including expanded stomal therapy capacity, a dedicated colorectal clinic and greater access to allied health services, such as psychology, social work and dietetics. We want to assure the public that the core high-quality medical care for these children will continue. Patients will still receive allied health and nursing support through the hospital, just as children with other complex surgical conditions do.

I would like to join my colleague Mr Galea in offering my support for the work of the CPRS – support enjoyed across the chamber from other speakers on this motion today for the Royal Children's Hospital – and reaffirm that we on this side of the chamber have a really strong record of investing in our public health system. We are committed to ensuring that the Royal Children's Hospital remains a world-class institution. Even though sometimes those helicopters that come through in the middle of the night wake me up and I wonder what is going on, I know that at the end of that hospital ride that patient will be treated by world-class physicians and a world-class system that can only be provided here in our city. That makes me a little bit proud each and every time I hear them and sometimes a little bit worried about what is happening and what the story is that has brought that helicopter to the sky.

I want to thank Mrs McArthur for bringing this motion forward and also for supporting the families to be here and hear our contributions. It is not often that we get to have the chamber full of people with real-life experience of the things that we are discussing, and so it matters and makes an enormous difference. Our priority absolutely remains the same, and that is the health and wellbeing of Victoria's children, and we will continue to invest in the Royal Children's Hospital. Long may those helicopters continue.

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (16:48): I too rise to speak on Mrs McArthur's motion, and I commend her for bringing it to the house today. I particularly want to talk about Meg from Ocean Grove in my electorate, who is a mother to an 11-year-old daughter who suffers from chronic constipation. This is Meg's story and these are Meg's words:

My first knowledge of the CPRS closure was the email on Friday that I read whilst sitting with my daughter in emergency at –

the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) –

... I had no warning this was happening and feel fortunate to be surrounded by other families at the BBQ (on Sunday) –

just gone –

feeling the same sense of anger, anxiety and pure disbelief that this has happened.

My 11-year-old has experienced chronic constipation since birth and started school with faecal incontinence. After seeing multiple professionals for several years, we were referred to the Paediatric gastroenterologist at RCH ... This was our pathway that landed us in the CPRS team about 5 years ago. My daughter had an appendicostomy and chait button inserted. The surgery has been life changing. Medically we can clear her bowel out every day. However, there are regular complications such as blocked tubes, rashes, bleeding from the stoma, dislodged chait button and occasionally impaction still occur. Many of the complications have been managed at home with timely advice from the CPRS clinical nurses and stomal nurses preventing hospital admissions.

We live in Ocean Grove. Our closest hospital is Geelong. We found one incontinence physiotherapist that had some understanding of our daughter's condition. However, local GP's do not have confidence to address complications and tell us we need to go back to RCH, for advice. We have also attended Geelong hospital for an inpatient admission prior to CPRS. My daughter experienced treatment that has had lasting psychological impacts and has left us without any confidence that our local ED is a viable option. In short, we have no other option but to travel to RCH for specialised care.

The psychological impact of colorectal conditionals is very real. My daughter has gone through periods of anxiety related to her condition and feeling very isolated and unable to share with her friends due to embarrassment. She has missed several days of school due to home treatment, hospitalisation or travel to RCH. This has had severe impacts on her learning at school.

Colorectal conditions are isolating. They are not seen in media, featured on the Good Friday appeal or talked about by those that are impacted. They are extremely isolating conditions that no one understands or wants to hear about. The CPRS team have created a wonderfully safe place for my child and myself to share my worries, concerns and questions and to have them met with unqualified understanding and solutions. More importantly having a small, accessible and responsive team has prevented small complications ending up in ED for yet another admission. Additionally, the CPRS picnic has created a tribe of 'button buddies' that have a special bond that is quite unlike any other friendship. They see other kids with buttons like their own and offer support to each other in a way that adults around them are unable to do in such the same way. This has been created by the CPRS team who listened to their little people and created a space for this to happen. Medical care is so much more than the physical for these kids.

That is Meg's story and, like so many others, shows the need to have ongoing support to the CPRS. I urge members to support this motion and support the families and patients who rely on this vital service so very much that it is life changing. Thank you again to Mrs McArthur for bringing this on.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:52): I rise to also make a contribution on this motion standing in Mrs McArthur's name, and I too want to thank Mrs McArthur for bringing this motion. I also want to acknowledge her personal connection to this matter. I have learned a lot today about some of the diseases that are experienced and treated by the colorectal and pelvic



reconstruction service (CPRS). It is one of the things about this job; you tend to learn a lot once you are in here. I can also say as a parent – when I had my son he was premature – I also had a similar journey with special care nurseries, paediatricians, doctors and the like, but of course not through this service. I understand that when you are a new parent sometimes you are plunged into a very disconcerting journey, not only having to navigate the experience of being a new parent but also having to deal with health concerns, so I also want to acknowledge the parents who have come in today into the gallery to listen to the debate and also anyone who may be watching us at home. That might be a few people, but nevertheless we want to acknowledge everyone who has an interest in this debate today. I can say that the government will not be opposing this motion. We support this motion.

For those who may be watching along at home, as I said, I did not know what was involved in this. I note, Mrs McArthur, you mentioned Hirschsprung disease, so I just did a little bit of research myself. I know Mr Galea made a very eloquent contribution around the sort of work that CPRS does, and there is good news and bad news of course. When a little one needs a service such as CPRS, it can be complex. Some children will not have a lot of complexities, but others will. It is a real testament to the doctors, the nurses and the clinicians that are involved in this service – the treatment that they provide for children. Having a look at Hirschsprung disease, some of the surgical interventions mean that the outcomes are excellent. It is not always straightforward, though, and sometimes it can be years in the process of getting a really good outcome for little kids. Nevertheless, the help and support that has been provided by CPRS – from everyone who has spoken on this in the chamber and looking at the reports of parents who have used the service – is really second to none. It just goes to show that we are so fortunate to be living in a country like Australia, where we have a fantastically supported public health system that is able to offer expert care and support to children.

A friend of a friend I know had a child who had similar indications, and it can be very disconcerting. Just looking at your motion, Mrs McArthur, it is framed very well, because you go into great detail about the sorts of supports – not only the medical intervention but the psychological support and support for parents who are having to get their heads around this as well. As I said, when you are a new parent having to deal with yet another issue that you are not familiar with, it helps to be provided that help and support by the expert clinicians and the nurses who are so caring and take expert care of our little people but also the families and the parents who are navigating this.

There is nothing more challenging than having to deal with a little one that is unwell, and of course when they are a baby they cannot tell you what is wrong. They cannot talk to you yet, so you have to try and figure that out. I remember those early days only too well when my little ones were unsettled. That is why in our health system we have so many experts to be able to be on hand to help navigate and find what is actually going on. A service like this is really something, and to have all that expertise in one place is excellent.

What I can say is I also looked at some of the responses that our government has made and some of the other circumstances around the funding. I note that the funding that was provided to this service was a \$5.9 million federal grant that was provided back in 2019. I note that that funding has come to an end and that our health minister, Mary-Anne Thomas in the other place, said that she has sought assurances from the hospital about this service. She has said that in terms of our funding support for the hospital, we have not changed our funding support at all and we continue to fund the hospital. Ms Thomas has also said that the health service has assured her that the quality and level of service to families would be maintained. That is important, because families also need certainty about the expert level of care and support that they can access. That is reassuring in one sense, but nevertheless it is the complex level of care that is often required. As I said, little ones might have surgery in the beginning but they might need additional surgeries over their journey and lifetime.

Our government in the 2024–25 budget invested a record investment in our health and hospital systems, including the Royal Children's Hospital. We have invested \$56.4 million to expand the existing emergency department and deliver a new 30-bed inpatient unit at the Royal Children's Hospital. This expansion will allow the hospital to continue to meet increasing demand through the

expansion of acute paediatric beds and emergency department services. Also, the first stage of the Royal Children's Hospital expansion to deliver a new 30-bed inpatient ward on level 5 was completed in 2022 and is treating patients with a range of different illnesses, including cancers.

I note the clock is going to beat me on this. Unfortunately, I came at the end of this debate. I just want to make sure that everyone understands that I am not trying to quickly rush through this. The clock is going to beat me, so I have to wrap up my comments very soon. Again, I just want to commend Mrs McArthur for bringing this. I also want to note that the tone in which this matter has been debated today has been sensitive and it has been done with a great sense of collegiality, which is a rare thing in this place. It is a good thing that we can all stand here in support of this service. The government will not be opposing this motion.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:59): I just want to rise to use the last 16 seconds to thank Mrs McArthur for this incredible motion that she has put forward and to thank the families that are here and those that are watching online. I have been incredibly moved, and I am so glad that we are able to stand up and support this motion. Thank you for bringing it to the house.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (16:59): 'Poo' is not a dirty word. It is the difference between life and death for vulnerable children battling rare congenital bowel conditions, colorectal malformations and chronic constipation. Never underestimate the celebration that follows a child's first bowel movement after corrective surgery. Never underestimate the relief parents feel when their child can attend kindergarten or school and play sports without the constant fear of soiling themselves. These are life-changing results of surgery, a correct diagnosis and the ongoing support from the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service allied health team at the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH). So why then would any government, any bureaucrat, any health professional, any human being want to end or even change this essential service – a service that is endorsed by every parent who has ever walked through the doors of Professor Sebastian King's world-class clinic at the Royal Children's Hospital. In fact any change to services so that they are in a manner consistent with that delivered to other patients, which is what the hospital is proposing, is incredibly detrimental to the child's health. I reiterate: this service has already changed. The CPRS will be no more. The funding has ended, and the CPRS wraparound service will end with it. No amount of spin from a hospital bureaucracy can change that.

Why is the hospital trying to lower the gold standard of care already provided to our precious children? And the cost? Very little. It is peanuts – just over \$1 million a year. In fact the cost of changing the logo, the letterhead and the furniture for the Minister for Health's office would clearly be higher. Many of the cost savings made by the CPRS for the community are hidden. It is not easy to put a price on the mental health impacts of specialised support that enables a child to go to kindergarten consistently or allows a parent to get to work and function. Even the direct savings are a false economy. In the short term the RCH may save money cutting this team, but the burden will simply be transferred to other parts of the Victorian health service. This is why the minister needs to take an overall view and intervene. And worse: isolated diagnoses and treatment in health care across the state will take longer and be less integrated and less effective. It will create more work and more cost. The \$5 million funding we are talking about has saved countless millions and improved hundreds of lives. It is the definition of 'good value' by government. To jeopardise it for short-term savings is unforgivable. This motion simply calls on the state health minister to pick up the phone to the Prime Minister and the federal health minister say, 'Please, continue to save our children.'

I want to thank my colleagues for speaking on this motion and supporting it so vigorously: Dr Renee Heath; Joe McCracken, my colleague in Western Victoria; Nick McGowan; Ann-Marie Hermans; Dr Sarah Mansfield, the Leader of the Greens in this house and also my colleague in Western Victoria; Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell from the One Nation party; and all the Labor MPs – John Berger, Michael Galea, Sheena Watt and Sonja Terpstra. I thank you and I thank the Labor Party for not opposing this motion. Your unwavering support and sharing the stories of families affected by complex colorectal issues are

important to this place. Most importantly, I would also like to thank Jeff Bourman from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, who gave up his spot today so that I may bring this motion forward.

Families feel abandoned after receiving the letter from the Royal Children's Hospital on Friday informing them that the CPRS they relied on is no more. It is heartbreaking. It is a service which has been lauded by the most eminent health professionals in the world. Please make sure it continues. For the kids in the room today, I am sure you would like the excitement of hearing the bells ring. But you know what? The bells are not going to ring, because everybody is supporting this motion. Everybody, across all parties, is supporting this motion, so you will not hear the bells. Believe it or not, we are all supporting this motion to make sure the CPRS continues. Thank you to the parents. Thank you to everybody who has come here today and the members of Parliament who have supported the motion.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion and orders of the day**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:05): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Statements on tabled papers and petitions*

#### **Eastern Health**

##### *Report 2023–24*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:05): I rise today to speak on the Eastern Health annual report for 2023–24, and it is a very nice segue after what we have just been talking about because I can talk about the Allan Labor government's commitment to funding our fantastic public health system. This highlights the ongoing commitment of Eastern Health to delivering exceptional healthcare services and fostering a healthier community, which is an important issue in my North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. The report provides an opportunity to reflect on the past year's achievements, to recognise progress and to look forward with a sense of optimism. At the core of Eastern Health's strategic plan is the guiding principle of 'Healthier together', and the vision has driven collaboration not only within the organisation but with community partners, ensuring that every individual can lead their best and healthiest life.

The strategic goals outlined in the report focus on empowering staff, enhancing patient care and optimising resources, all while maintaining a safe and inclusive environment for Victoria's diverse community. Having said that, I know also that our recent announcement that we have made in regard to strengthening nurse-to-patient ratios in our public hospital system will also make a huge difference not only to our hardworking nurses but also to improving patient outcomes in our hospital system. The biggest partner of Eastern Health is the Allan Labor government, as I said. We have invested approximately \$1.324 billion into Eastern Health alone. The funding has allowed Eastern Health to build a sustainable workforce, provide a high standard of care to patients and invest in their future. The Allan Labor government will always value public health, whether it be access to abortion, medical termination, stroke care or the myriad of other services that are provided in our public health system.

A key achievement over the past year of Eastern Health has been their commitment to building and engaging a sustainable workforce. By fostering strong partnerships with universities and training providers, Eastern Health has positioned itself as a learning organisation that develops the healthcare workforce of the future. This investment ensures the delivery of high-quality care and support to patients across the region, and might I say it is a very big and extensive region. The region that Eastern Health serves is, I think, either the biggest or the second-biggest in the state of Victoria. In terms of

patient care, significant progress has been made in strengthening partnerships with patients, consumers and the broader community. Shared decision-making and co-designed care models have been embraced, ensuring services are tailored to meet the specific needs of the diverse patient community. Innovative models of care and technology have also enabled health care to be delivered closer to home and in some cases in home through the hospital-in-the-home model. This improves accessibility for patients as well.

A strong emphasis has also been placed on safety and inclusivity. By prioritising employee wellbeing and engagement Eastern Health has cultivated workplace diversity values and equity. Efforts to enhance workplace safety have resulted in a notable reduction in incidents, ensuring staff can perform their duties in a secure and supportive environment. Again this is about supporting our hardworking nurses, doctors and midwives in the healthcare system.

The report also highlights key performance indicators, particularly in infection prevention and control. This is something that is critically important. Compliance with the Hand Hygiene Australia program exceeded target, reaching an impressive 87.2 per cent, while healthcare worker immunisation rates for influenza alone reached 97.5 per cent, which demonstrates a strong commitment to protecting both staff and patients by our hardworking healthcare workers.

In the area of mental health, Eastern Health recognises the need for continuous improvement. The clock is going to beat me on this, but I just want to mention in the minute that I have left that notably the report also talks about Turning Point's vital role in delivering innovative research, education and treatment services. This service is somewhere that I have visited a number of times. During the financial year Turning Point secured over \$5.5 million in grants for impactful research projects, reinforcing its national leadership in addiction research and services and evidence-based intervention. I am pleased to have been able to speak on this important information contained in Eastern Health's annual report, and I commend the report to the house.

### **Department of Transport and Planning**

#### *Report 2023–24*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:10): I rise to speak on the Department of Transport and Planning's annual report for 2023–24. The details of the report show just how poorly this government is doing in maintaining roads in this state. The government has actually slashed the rehabilitation and resurfacing work that has been done on country roads by a staggering 95 per cent. In 2022–23 the road area treated was close to 9 million square metres. In 2023–24 it was just 422,000 square metres. Labor has also slashed spending on resurfacing from \$201 million to \$37 million in that period. There were also frequent delays in rolling out projects in the 2023–24 year. Only 69 per cent of programmed regional projects finished on time. We recently saw the government trying to resell old promises by packaging together a long list of little projects and saying they were going to spend \$964 million on resurfacing roads, but it was too little and it was too late. How many cars have been damaged when hitting massive potholes that have degraded for years? Even worse, drivers who report damage to their cars are rarely compensated for it by this government.

Every week my colleagues and I stand up in Parliament and tell the government which roads are in disgraceful condition and desperately need work, and every week we are ignored. Nothing is done for regional roads while billions of dollars is spent on metropolitan projects. In fact today we have seen even further blowouts on those projects. Labor could not be clearer that they do not care about regional Victoria and are happy to let the regional road network fall into disgraceful disrepair. From the \$964 million that Labor scraped together and announced, four of the 11 districts within my region did not get one single project. They were in the Murray Plains electorate and the Eildon electorate, but they were also in the Bendigo East and Bendigo West electorates – the Premier's own electorate and the Speaker's electorate. No roads are to be repaired in those four electorates. In those districts lucky enough to have some roads on the list for repair, constituents have been left completely in the dark about when these projects will actually be done. The minister replied to my question on notice asking

for a schedule of road repairs by saying that they would be progressively rolled out over the maintenance season. That is not good enough. We know the maintenance season is usually the summer. We are now getting to the end of the summer and we have not seen the work being done.

I was recently contacted by a constituent from Macedon Ranges asking about repairs to the Tylden-Woodend Road. She asked when the repairs would be done, because we had advised her and we had advised the media that that road was on the list for repair. The RACV My Country Road survey said that that Tylden-Woodend Road was actually the second-worst road in Victoria, yet no repairs on that road have started. Here we are within two weeks of the end of the summer. No repairs have started on that road, yet it is supposed to be the maintenance season. My constituent tells me that she travels this road often and that the damage to the road surface is so bad that it is just a matter of time before there is an accident. It is listed for repair, but no-one knows when that work will start or when it will be finished.

I had a similar email from a different constituent telling me about a short drive he took with his 17-year-old son, who is learning to drive. He was learning to drive around potholes. They started in Gisborne, went through Riddells Creek and headed towards Romsey. My constituent tells the story of this road journey and how he passed by several memorials to those who had sadly died on those same roads – five people dead in just a 10-kilometre stretch of road. This troubling number is deeply worrying. All along this journey there are potholes, cracks and ripples, and long stretches where instead of fixing the road the government has simply put up signs to reduce the speed limit down to 60 kilometres. That seems to be Labor's solution all over regional Victoria – to put up signs reducing the speed instead of actually fixing the roads so that people can drive comfortably and safely in country Victoria. More needs to be done. I could go on and on about roads in regional Victoria.

### **Environment and Planning Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:15): I rise today to make a statement on the government's response to the Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into the 2022 flooding event, which was tabled in the last sitting week. As chair of the Environment and Planning Committee for part of its inquiry into the 2022 flood event in Victoria, I welcome the government's response to the report. The final report of the committee, which I think was a constructive cross-partisan inquiry, made 90 findings and 73 recommendations. I am pleased the government has supported, either in full or in principle, 59 of those, while it supports in part a further six, and six recommendations are still under review. The final report that the committee tabled was the result of more than 900 public submissions. There were 12 days of public hearings across Victoria, including in many of the flood-affected communities. The committee heard many stories of devastation, of loss and of tragedy from communities who are seeking a way forward.

The government, as is articulated in its response, has not waited for the final report to take action but since the end of the flood event has been working hard to deliver for these communities. Therefore some of the recommendations contained in the committee's final report call for action that the government in fact has already been undertaking. Some of the key recommendations within the report were that the government adequately fund and support the Victorian State Emergency Service and the Country Fire Authority, whose volunteers, as the committee's report noted, undertook a brave and invaluable response within the community at the time of the October 2022 floods, saving much of the community. In December last year the Victorian government announced a commitment of more than \$250 million to support VICSES and CFA volunteers throughout this state. At our hearings, some of the key accounts from witnesses voiced concerns over some of the equipment that was being used by units; \$70 million of the funding announced in December last year will be put towards establishing a rolling fleet replacement program for VICSES and the CFA. New and upgraded trucks, tankers and pumpers will be all part of that program. Further, the budget for the Victorian emergency services

equipment program will be more than doubled, with more than \$62 million in initial funding being provided over the next four years.

Recommendation 49 in the committee report highlighted a need to increase funding for the training of volunteers to boost VICSES units. Within that December 2024 package announced by the government, around \$30 million has been allocated to deliver training and support to upskill volunteers. The government has also committed \$53 million towards a modernised VicEmergency app and a central database for our emergency services. This relates particularly to recommendation 44, that the Victorian government improve the accuracy, timeliness and relevance of the VicEmergency app service during an emergency so that it can meet the diverse needs of different communities during a crisis, and recommendation 46, that the Victorian government ensure that the emergency management warning system is inclusive and able to be used by all Victorians. It is very heartening that those recommendations are being taken so seriously by the government.

Some other recommendations made by the committee, including recommendations 14 and 16, advocated for increased protections for vulnerable people during flood disasters, including that people with disability are featured in all disaster preparedness and response plans. In May 2024 the government released the Victorian emergency management planning toolkit for people most at risk. This was co-designed with a range of stakeholders and emergency management experts. The toolkit aims to support Victoria's emergency management planning to be more dynamic and situation based, with a focus on those most at risk.

There were some calls for some legislation amendments, including recommendation 18, which stipulated for the introduction of amendments to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 so that planning and other authorities must address climate change at all levels of the planning process. The recommendation was supported in full, and the government has wasted no time in making the necessary legislative amendments. The Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Act 2024 made two significant changes to support the greater consideration of climate change in the planning system.

The committee made particular note through recommendation 7 that the government ensures that regional catchment management authorities and local councils are funded and resourced to conduct and implement up-to-date flood studies. Following the event, the Victorian government has funded four CMAs to coordinate management arrangements for levees.

There is a lot that has happened as a result of the October 2022 floods. The report itself of the committee, with great work by all committee members, was very comprehensive and the government's response just as so.

### **Victorian Auditor-General's Office**

#### *Major Projects Performance Reporting 2024*

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:20): I rise to speak today on the tabled report from the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Major Projects Performance Reporting 2024*, dated February 2025. It is an extraordinary report. It is a quite factual report. I want to start by saying how mortified I was and any independent observer would be at the comments today from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Ms Williams, describing the Auditor-General's work as shoddy and criticising the work of the Auditor-General. But we see this so much with independent agencies: when they give the slightest criticisms of this government, it will describe and bat away reports of the likes of IBAC, the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General and attempt to undermine our independent agencies. Can I just say that is contemptuous and disgraceful.

The report exposes significant budget increases and highlights financial challenges facing Victoria's infrastructure projects. It shows that major project costs have increased by \$11.6 billion. In the last 12 months, of the 113 projects, 53 have collectively exceeded their original budgets by \$14.9 billion –

all of which the Labor Party have been attempting to cover up. The Labor Party have not been forthcoming in their budgets and budget process. We have a budget once a year and a budget update once a year; they have not been forthcoming about these blowouts.

We saw that the Auditor-General has recommended more meaningful reporting on major projects, including explanations of schedules, delays, blowouts and changes of scope. Yet for some reason – and you can understand her outburst this morning – the minister’s department, the Department of Transport and Planning, has rejected the key recommendation for more meaningful reporting on major projects. It actually goes into some detail in saying that the reporting that the departments have – that the minister has in her bottom drawer – is actually quite good and detailed, but we know that this government does not want us to see it. They do not want us to see it because of what they are hiding and what they have been hiding, which is \$15 billion in budget blowouts on major projects. This government cannot manage money and cannot manage major projects, and it is Victorians that are paying the price for this.

We saw that the SRL East early works have blown out by \$300 million – and this was hidden from the budget papers. We see risks identified again, and in the last sitting week the government was saying, ‘We don’t need to worry about risks. That was a document from a long time ago.’ The Auditor-General’s report identifies risk in the Suburban Rail Loop and exposes the fact that there have been many contaminated sites identified. When I asked the minister today to identify the sites – where they are – and if they are a threat to the community, how they would be remedied, the minister did not answer that question. I think people ought to know. The Suburban Rail Loop, as we know, is about as popular as the Premier right now, which is not very much. We ought to have some transparency around this. We know they have blown the budget now on this. Will further budget blowouts be in the upcoming May budget?

The Auditor-General’s Office report identifies that a price reset has been undertaken with the contractor on the Suburban Rail Loop already. Will the price reset – that investigation, that review – be factored into the upcoming May budget? Or will Mr Carroll – a friend of Mr Galea – get his way and reset the entire Suburban Rail Loop process so they can fund projects in the north, in the west and in the south-east? This is a scathing report. I recommend that all those on the other side read it.

### **Triple Zero Victoria**

#### *Report 2023–24*

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:25): I rise today to deliver a statement on the Triple Zero Victoria 2023–24 annual report. Triple Zero Victoria is often the first emergency service that Victorians will reach out to when they need help. It is the critical link between the community and our tireless frontline emergency responders. Among other things, the report details how TZV consistently exceeds its targets for call answering and dispatch times. This was despite facing call loads far above the previous year’s average, especially for the VICSES and the CFA. TZV answers nearly 3 million calls per year, an average of nearly 8000 calls per 24-hour period, and this comes to about one call every 10.9 seconds. For those numbers – if we keep them in mind – this report speaks to the professionalism of the staff. Nearly 100 per cent of all call information in the year under review was processed accurately despite the huge pressure faced by call takers.

Under the Allan Labor government Victorians can have the confidence that the highly trained team at TZV, under the guidance of their CEO Debra Abbott, will connect them with the emergency services that they need exactly when and where they need them. In fact it was only last year when I visited Debra and the hardworking team at the Melbourne office that I had the chance to see their expert staff in full swing, allowing first-line responders to reach serious accidents, fires and disruptions caused by extreme weather events in time to save lives. I was absolutely blown away by the focus and specialised skill set of the call takers and dispatchers, who were able to seamlessly communicate between members of the public and frontline responders while also updating incident files and escalating issues

to other team members. One dispatcher I talked to was even able to operate his radios via foot pedals while typing notes with his hands.

Let me repeat something I said a fortnight ago in this place about our emergency service members: I could not be more inspired by the self-sacrifice which is demonstrated by frontline responders and support teams in our emergency services day in and day out, I have got to tell you. Part of what makes this job such a privilege is the chance to meet with Victorians who come together from all walks of life and give up precious time with family and friends to help protect and rebuild their communities. Whether that is as part of Triple Zero Victoria or as a frontline responder in the CFA or VICSES, all of our emergency services bodies are indispensable – absolutely indispensable – in this state. Emergency services members are really the beating heart of our communities. That is why the Allan Labor government is backing our emergency services with, as I understand, in the 2024–25 budget an allocation of nearly \$7 million in additional funding over four years to VICSES to deliver support programs and training for volunteers. We committed nearly \$20 million in asset funding for the CFA, some of which has been earmarked to roll out 15 new pumpers across the state. Just over two weeks ago in this place we discussed at length how our government is supporting workers at Ambulance Victoria. I was really proud to make a contribution to the bill on funding the paramedic practitioners to take pressure off emergency departments. Triple Zero Victoria is the glue that brings these emergency services together, and the achievements detailed in this report made possible by the Allan Labor government deserve celebrating each and every day of the year.

### **Waste and recycling management**

#### *Petition*

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:29): I rise today to speak on the petition that I tabled in this house earlier today that was signed by over 3000 concerned residents from Lynbrook, Hampton Park, Narre Warren South, Lyndhurst, Cranbourne, Cranbourne North, Endeavour Hills and surrounding suburbs. I want to acknowledge that this petition was supplemented by a number of signatures that have just arrived in my office and were not here in time to be part of this petition and its tabling, and also acknowledge that there are over 1415 residents that signed an e-petition calling for action. The number of people that are extremely concerned about the issues that this petition is about is rising every day as people become aware of what is at stake. It is not just a small group of concerned residents; it is an entire region that is making it abundantly clear that the project does not have social support from the community.

What is this project that I am talking about? It is in fact the City of Casey's approval for the largest waste transfer facility in Victoria, and it is going to be around local residents. From what I have been able to see in my research, nowhere in a First World country can I see a waste transfer facility like this anywhere near residential homes. There are laws that protect that in some places, to say that it needs to be a minimum of at least 500 metres from residential areas for public safety reasons. But this particular one is going to be, potentially, from the City of Casey's meeting last night, 54 metres from the residential zone – 54 metres from where people live, where people breathe, where they are raising their families. This is not to overlook the fact that there are also a number of underground springs in this local area where water can easily be contaminated, and the facility borders a number of lakes in the area where homes are built. So you can imagine the turmoil and trauma of the number of residents that live in the area, many of whom have bought or built their dream homes. Others are living there because that is just the area that they have grown up in and they are in one of the older suburbs. We have got a mixture of new suburbs, old suburbs and everything in between, and that allows us to understand the nature of the diversity of the people that live in the area, and yet there has not been proper consultation of the residents. You can imagine for people who are raising their families what this is doing to them – the thought that they might be putting not just their own lives and their own health at risk but also risking danger to their own children.



This is an issue that people are trying to raise awareness about. They are genuinely concerned, and they do not feel that people are listening. They feel abandoned by the City of Casey, which signed off on papers before we had any local councillors. Days before the local councillors were brought in, they signed off on it, and of course council was under the administration of the state government. They feel abandoned by the state government, because it is not listening, and they feel that they are taking on a giant here, a goliath, and that they are the little people simply trying to speak out. I think that in many cases they have been completely overlooked because people thought that they could get away with it. The residents want you to know that you simply cannot get away with it. They are going to speak from every corner of their residential areas and beyond so that you can understand as a government how incredibly important it is to listen to these people and to move this waste transfer facility.

It is going to be the largest waste transfer facility in Victoria and also perhaps in many other parts of Australia. We do not have anything quite like what this is going to do. The proposed site appears to be in clear breach of the EPA's 500-metre separation guideline, which they made, and so I think that it is really important that we understand the safety risk. It is posing a risk of air pollution, noise, odour and hazardous waste management which is going to far exceed what any residential community should be expected to tolerate. And yet despite these clear violations we find that they are not getting heard by anybody, and so we will be debating this in this house, and I am looking forward to that.

### **Local Jobs First**

#### *Report 2022–23*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:34): I rise to speak on the Local Jobs First report 2022–23. The Andrews and Allan Labor governments have taken Australia's longest standing industry participation policy and propelled it forward, with a transformational focus on local content requirements for more than 300 strategic projects now since 2014. This does not just mean ensuring that local businesses and local workers benefit from local content requirements for \$26 billion worth of projects in 2022–23 alone. It also means ensuring that Victorian businesses and Victorian workers have the skills, capacity and knowledge to deliver projects locally well into the future. This is a government that is committed to developing and providing opportunities for local businesses that employ skilled workers right across this state, creating scale and capacity for private ventures across various industries, powering the Victorian economy well into the future. Because of this, we on this side of the chamber believe that Victorian workers and Victorian businesses are the best placed to drive that future economic growth. We have the confidence that we have the skills and the ability to deliver what our state needs within Victoria, built by the hard work and skill of business owners, apprentices and trainees.

We have seen more than 340 new Victorian-built trains and trams since 2015 alone. We have seen the X'Trapolis 2.0, with the first of those sets rolling off the assembly line now in Ballarat. That will be the core trunk of several lines of the network, including for the Frankston line in my region and other lines right across. I believe the Craigieburn and Upfield lines will also benefit from those new X'Trapolis 2.0 trains as they are rolled out, and indeed they will be well placed to take advantage of the capacity benefits brought about by the opening of the Metro Tunnel later this year. I note, talking about the Metro Tunnel, we have got the new high-capacity metro trains as well, which are being maintained and serviced not far from my electorate at the terrific depot at Pakenham East, just near the new East Pakenham station that has also been built. The 70-odd high-capacity metro trains which have been delivered will complement the existing X'Trapolis trains, the X'Trapolis 2.0 – those Ballarat-made new trains that we are bringing in – as well as the Siemens and other Comeng trains that we still have running as the backbone of our rail fleet.

As we are delivering these trains, it is very, very good to see that investment going into the Ballarat region. On top of that we are seeing the new G-class trams, which will soon be coming into service, again with the new depot in Maidstone in the western suburbs, which will support the delivery of the rollout of the new G-class trams on routes 57, 59 and 82, giving that corner of Melbourne Melbourne's

newest and most up-to-date trams very shortly. Of course this comes on top of the order of existing X'Trapolis trains – X'Trapolis 1.0, if you like – that have been locally made right here and out there in Ballarat, and this is the government that has supported it. Indeed we support it more with the 82 new VLocity regional trains that we have also delivered. We are seeing those services come through, with not just the new trains replacing older, increasingly unreliable stock, but also the new trains providing that extra capacity for more services.

In the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last year we had many debates and discussions in our outcome hearings about the Warrnambool train line. I acknowledge that, as Ms Ermacora will be the first to say, there has been a fair amount of disruption as we have upgraded that line and done those important works. The end result of that now is that we do have the Warrnambool line running much more reliably, with more services as a result of VLocity trains being used on those lines – locally built in fact in that case in Dandenong, in my electorate of South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. It is terrific that we are seeing the benefit of the skills and the workers in my electorate that have gone into making those trains in places like Warrnambool, in Gippsland, in the west and in Northern Victoria. It was very disappointing that we had the Liberal members of PAEC at that time, Mrs McArthur and Mr McGowan, attacking those new VLocity trains and attacking the local jobs that have gone into that. I would hope that we have united support for Victorian manufacturing, for Victorian rolling stock in this chamber. Sadly, it appears that we do not. There were some disparaging comments about the X'Trapolis 2.0 trains as well, which completely misunderstood the very purpose of these trains. Nevertheless, on this side of the house we will continue to champion local jobs for Victorian workers right across this state.

### *Petitions*

#### **Newhaven Jetty**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:40): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

If you travel from San Remo over to Phillip Island, you are greeted with a beautiful vista. You are greeted with San Remo on the left, and to the right you are greeted with the Newhaven Jetty. It is a T-shaped jetty, and it has been serving that community for decades. It is popular, land-based and disability-friendly, and it is a mecca for anglers, tourists and those wishing to be out in nature to grab a fantastic photo that they can cherish with their families. It is magnificent scenery, and it is magnificent fishing, as all the locals will tell you. It has history, and it adds great value to the tourism industry as well as mental health benefits for the locals.

In 2018, rather than completing a maintenance check on the south arm of that T, Labor barricaded the section. Unbeknownst to locals, surface conditional assessments were being undertaken by Parks Victoria, the body that looks after that jetty, and information was being fed to the state government. Recommendations and requests to the Minister for Ports and Freight for funding to conduct further detailed structural and load-bearing engineering assessments were ignored. We have heard the words 'shaky figures' in FOIs and cost estimates ranging from \$120,000 to \$530,000 to \$3 million to 'dot, dot, dot' to reopen the approach arm. They were uncovered by the FOI documents that I have found.

You will not be surprised that the local community were dismayed beyond belief, frustrated and angry when on 21 May last year the entire Newhaven Jetty was barricaded off with high wire and closed to public access with a 'Permanent closure' sign – permanently, without warning and with no prior contact or forewarning to the locals, not from the local member, the local department or the minister for ports. Clearly, Bass Coast is suffering from a lack of transparency, a lack of priority and a lack of respect and advocacy. When I met with locals early in June at a rally, where there were about 100 people standing right beside that closed-off jetty, it stimulated action, and I was happy to sponsor the petition that came from the community. I would like to thank Amanda Keilar, Ben Dennis, Brian Johnston, Lisa Webster, Terry Hendrix, the 2424 who took up the campaign and signed in a matter of

days and the additional 1300 who signed the e-petition online. I would like to acknowledge Ben, Amanda and Lisa, who are in the audience today and who have been able to get in to meet the minister after my request earlier this week noting their attendance.

Reiterating the petition, it is about requesting the government provide funding to reopen that jetty and provide a timeline for the community. Clearly, erecting a fence is a get-out-of-jail, cheapest option, but it is not best to serve that community. Looking at the social, ecological and environmental impact, we spoke to Amanda Keilar, who is a wonderful advocate for her region. She talked about the disability accessibility of that platform and how it should be available to everyone, irrespective of their ability or financial status in a cost-of-living crisis.

Ben Dennis signed a 21-year lease on Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action land that abuts the Newhaven Jetty. He has put his life savings into the Saltwater restaurant. He has not had a grant from the government. He took it all on himself, but he had a long vision because he had a long lease. Now he is facing a closed jetty and walled-off fence. He employs somewhere up to 30 people, and his business model is centred around creating that wonderful opportunity for weddings and functions and photos out on the end of that jetty. Now he is at a loss with his business, and indeed his personal health is suffering. That is not good enough.

Parks Victoria were looking to find a way to fund this, and they had three options – one was to do nothing, and the other two were about maintaining public access. Labor's Sustainable Local Ports Framework has not listed this jetty, and others may talk about this later, but an internal document from the FOIs actually has Newhaven ranked at number two behind Middle Brighton, which received \$24 million in 2021. Now it seems to have been lost from the agenda. This government absolutely must take this petition, understand the community sentiment and work with this community to find a way to open that jetty.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:45): I want to start off by acknowledging those that are here today and those that are watching online. In my role as a member for Eastern Victoria Region, I am constantly talking to people about boating and about fishing. It is absolutely not lost on me the value to our communities and to tourists of jetties and piers. Whether it is our kids getting out on them, whether it is people just being able to go for a stroll or indeed fishing or launching boats, it is really, really valuable, and I am proud that our government has taken long-term approach to investing in infrastructure so people can get active, can get out and about and can follow pursuits, hobbies or whatever it might be on the water.

The member for Bass Jordan Crugnale is here right now. We were out on the water on Western Port just last week. I chat to Jordan frequently and I have been chatting to Jordan today. Jordan is an incredible advocate for her local community, but I do want to acknowledge those that have signed the petition on the Newhaven Jetty. My region covers the peninsula all the way to the New South Wales border, alongside Ms Bath, who spoke first on this. We have parts of Dromana Pier that have – I hope my technical terms are right – effectively rust within the concrete, which have been fenced off and are waiting for repair. There are a number of jetties and piers that are having work done on them or have had work done on them, and it has been great to get on some of those that are finished, but obviously there are others that are waiting for work to occur.

In talking to Jordan I know that she has been in with the minister this afternoon pushing the case for the Newhaven Jetty, and Jordan has told me, as I look up to her in here, that we have got recreation fishing advocates Amanda Keilar and Lisa Webster; as Ms Bath has pointed out, representatives of the Newhaven Residents Group, with 250 members; and Ben Dennis from Saltwater Phillip Island, who has invested in the boatshed and turned it into a wonderful hospitality venue. On behalf of Jordan and me, thank you for your ongoing advocacy and the work that you have done in this, noting the history of the jetty and the area. On behalf of the government, on behalf of Jordan, we absolutely hear you. We have got a commitment to investing in jetties and piers for all the reasons that I outlined earlier, and your local member is working hard advocating for you on this issue.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:48): I rise to speak in support of the petition qualifying for debate in Ms Bath's name, and I want to congratulate Ms Bath and also the outstanding community members who have put their hands to the plough and gathered more signatures than any other petition in the history of this Parliament. Not only is that an incredible community achievement but it also speaks to the importance of this issue, an issue that the government would do well not to overlook but to actually act on. I want to say, Mr McIntosh, the fact that you and Ms Crugnale were out on the water just last week does not actually provide the communities you are neglecting with any comfort.

Jetties are an important community asset that provide the community with access to local waterways, an important part of the community's lifestyle. The Newhaven Jetty, which is in my electorate as well as Ms Bath's and Mr McIntosh's, in Eastern Victoria Region, has huge historical significance, not only for Newhaven but for the wider Bass Coast community. It was originally constructed in the 1900s. It is part of the history of the community, which is much loved not only by locals but also by tourists. That is why so many are rallying to have it restored after it was closed to the public indefinitely without any warning due to what they called structural failures after a visual inspection. Documents accessed via freedom of information showed that the government stopped a level 3 engineering assessment being done that would have assessed its structural and capacity load. Why would they do that? The jetty should not be shut down. The jetty should be restored. Locals were blindsided by this. There was no consultation with community or stakeholders, no consultation with fishing advocates, no consultation with the Saltwater Phillip Island restaurant, regardless of the fact that it will possibly have detrimental impacts on that business, and no consultation with the community.

I think it is high time that this government stops overlooking local communities. The government need to remember that they were not elected to govern just for Melbourne, they were not elected to govern just for within the tram tracks – they were elected to govern for all Victorians, including rural and regional communities like this one. To be quite frank, they are failing that, so I commend this motion to the house.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (17:51): I commend Melina Bath for being a strong community advocate. She is asking the questions and she is seeking answers, engaging with the community, pursuing the government and drawing this issue to the attention of Parliament. Newhaven is a beautiful small town on Phillip Island near San Remo, and I have enjoyed visiting Phillip Island over the years for family holidays and enjoyed many fish and chips on the beach. Thousands of people have signed this petition, and there would be many more who have got memories of being on that jetty. It was a well-used public asset with a popular recreational fishing platform.

Really, this could almost be like a blockbuster movie if you were to write a script. The petition calls on the government to save the Newhaven Jetty and deliver funding and a timeline for its reopening in consultation with local residents. It has taken freedom-of-information requests to reveal that the jetty could have remained open with maintenance and was high on the internal infrastructure priority list, yet it was closed last year – with no consultation, no advance notice, no transparency and no proper assessment of its structural condition or due diligence to ascertain the cost to fix it. Its closure is having a big impact on local businesses with a decline in tourism. It was closed without notice. No consultation with key stakeholders – just closed with fences put up and padlocked. Sound familiar?

They put a padlock on our sustainable native timber industry. More than six years earlier than expected this government announced the industry would close within months. It was devastating for the towns and the families that relied on this industry. At the *Herald Sun* bush summit in Bendigo the Premier declared that she would not padlock our forests, yet within months we saw the opposite. They have since put a padlock on Mount Arapiles, a world-class rock-climbing site that draws people to towns like Natimuk.

Ms Bath today presented a petition for no new national parks, a petition that has broken the record for the highest number of signatures with I believe over 40,000 signatures. They are people who want our parks and forests to remain open and accessible. But this government love padlocks and they love

secrecy. The Commonwealth Games is another example of closure without notice – cancelled, just like that – of an international sporting event. It made a mockery of our state on the world stage. During the course of the parliamentary inquiry into this issue we requested documents in this chamber that the government should have produced, and the government refused to produce them. I am still waiting for answers to a question I raised about the Commonwealth Games which dates back to 2023. The state government exists to manage money, public money, so you would expect transparency in the process. But too often we have seen this government ask people to sign non-disclosure agreements or confidentiality agreements.

I remember speaking with people in the timber industry when they faced closure – six years earlier than expected, as I said – who were scared about speaking out because the government had forced them to sign an agreement. Otherwise they would have been eligible for no payouts at all. I am concerned that this government does not know how to maintain history. They like glossy new buildings and ribbons they can cut, but they are not so good at maintaining historically significant sites. I am thinking of the old Bendigo law courts – a beautiful example of Bendigo's heritage architecture from the 1890s – which have sat empty since the new law courts were opened in February 2023. There have been calls from the community for it to be put to good use, amid fears it will fall into disrepair. The Attorney-General, 12 months ago this next week, indicated that there would be meaningful community engagement, but I am yet to see that happen.

But here we are. Newhaven Jetty is a popular jetty in a small town. Closing it makes a big difference. It was closed based on a visual inspection. Perhaps the government need a new pair of glasses – they need to go to Specsavers. This government needs a new vision and a new perspective that values small towns in regional areas. No, the jetty is not the \$200 billion Suburban Rail Loop. It is not one of the 53 projects that the Auditor-General identified today that will cost nearly \$15 billion more than expected. Just to maintain this jetty is literally a drop in the ocean, but the track record of this state government over the last decade is clear: they cannot manage money and regional communities across the state are paying the price. I commend Ms Bath for bringing this matter before the Parliament today.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (17:55): I will make a short contribution to the petition that Ms Bath has presented today to restore the Newhaven Jetty. 2424 signatures is not an insignificant amount of people, particularly for what would appear to be a niche sort of issue. The Newhaven Jetty is, obviously, important to at least the 2400 people that signed that petition but clearly a lot more. The use of a jetty is not just for fishing. There are a lot of people who go out there to think about life. There are times when I like going to a jetty just to be out on the water. I have got to say sometimes if the squid are running it is not exactly lonely out there – there are a zillion people – but there are times when you can go out there and just spend some time enjoying nature. To take up one little part that Mrs Broad brought up, it is a small amount of money in the big picture. The Newhaven Jetty, even if it were to be – not that I am suggesting this, because it is a historic jetty – razed and rebuilt, would still be a tiny amount in the scheme of things. To a small town these amounts add up to a lot. We are seeing a problem in regional and rural Victoria in general with declines in the amount of jobs leading to various socio-economic issues. I think the government should sit up and take notice of a petition such as this, because it is an opportunity for what I see as a small spend to do a lot for a small community.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:57): I thank the members for their contributions: Mr McIntosh, Dr Heath, Mrs Broad and Mr Bourman, who shares the electorate with Dr Heath, Mr McIntosh and me. My colleague Mrs Broad has such a beautiful turn of phrase and can knit an argument with such eloquence. It is always delightful to listen to her. I thank Mr Bourman for coming in and participating in this. There is a word in his party title which actually relates to fishing, so it was fabulous that he was able to use that today. Dr Heath is of course always ready to support not only her electorate but also members on this side of the chamber in debate, so thank you. Mr McIntosh, what I would like to see and I am sure what all of the community down there in Newhaven would like to see is for you to come down with your local member, the member for Bass, and cut the chains that sit on that jetty after it has been improved and upgraded. What the whole community would like to see is a

positive outcome, and that is why as a member of Parliament when you are in opposition you use the instruments that are available to you. You use petitions, you use debates and you use freedom of information because you do not have your hands on the purse. As we have heard today, this government has a black hole of debt, and the debt is a centrifugal force that is centred on the centre of Melbourne. So many times regional Victoria, including Eastern Victoria, is left by the wayside, and our communities feel that acutely. It is very hard, and most people will know this when they are out in their community. You have somebody whose life vision is in jeopardy – *(Time expired)*

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Adjournment*

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:00): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Crime**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:00): (1421) Many times I have been in the electorate and I would have community members – ordinary, everyday people – come up and clasp my hand and say, ‘Don’t forget us.’ What is meant by that is that their genuine concern is that once people get elected and once we enter the political bubble, their experiences, the concerns of everyday Victorians, recede from view, that in practice we cease to feel their lived experience, let alone addressing their needs – ‘Don’t forget us.’

This adjournment is to seek an action from the Premier, but the subtext is for my community, for those people who have clasped my hand and looked me square in the eye and said, ‘Don’t forget us.’ This is very much for them too. This is about crime in your area, crime ruining lives across your state and for your family. I can rattle off any number of statistics. This chamber is awash with empirical evidence of the crisis we have. But the people out there do not need statistics. They know from experience. They suffer and they carry the scars – the young man who was accosted in his car and now feels something is broken inside him; the frustration of a young woman who told me she was afraid to walk to the gym alone; families who have had break-ins at night, forever scarring those families, and for whom from that moment on every bump in the night is to relive a nightmare; the shopkeeper I spoke to, a woman losing stock, losing trade and losing the will to fight when there is no civil support at all but plenty of tax, tax, tax – ‘Don’t forget me,’ she said. The welding company I visited, who had to lay people off because they were ramraided three times in two months and lost vital equipment – ‘Mate, don’t forget us.’ The elderly couple I know who literally dread going down to their local shopping strip – the husband said he was ashamed that he could not protect himself or his wife. He said, ‘I know you’re busy, Richard, but don’t forget us.’ The families that lost a family member because they resisted or were hit by a fleeing car – don’t you see what is happening? What are you going to do? Are you going to stand by and let it happen again? Walk any street and you will be told, ‘Oh, yes, the neighbours had their car stolen last week, across the road they had a break-in and we had a group of youths in our driveway at 3 am. Thank God they didn’t get in.’

I have not forgotten you, any of you. The action I seek from the Premier is to remember the people she has forgotten and change the bail laws now. Do not review. Do not do a heartfelt press conference that means nothing. Do not blather on about any other meaningless promise. Do not talk – for God’s sake, act.

### **Wastewater management**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:03): (1422) My matter is for the Minister for Water tonight, and it concerns a series of important projects: the Hobsons Bay main upgrade project, the UAMTEC work agreement with Melbourne Water and its contracts and the Church Street stormwater drain rehabilitation. Here is a case where Melbourne Water has responsibility for our drainage and

sewerage system, and indeed the drainage and sewerage system has decayed over the years. I know the Auditor-General did a significant report in the middle 2000s pointing out the problems with the deterioration in the system, some of it going back 100 years and more. You cannot have a large city growing without maintaining your drains and your sewer, and you cannot do that without putting the money and resources in. Melbourne Water has been the subject of massive depredations by this government as it drags out dividends, it drags out capital reprioritisations – billions of dollars sucked out of Melbourne Water. People pay large water rates, but the money is being sucked out the other side by the state government. This task of maintaining the drains and repairing them and ensuring the stormwater and sewerage systems are in good order is a basic task. There have been a number of brick collapses, for example, in the Hobsons Bay main upgrade project; deficiencies in the GeoKrete lining of the Church Street stormwater drain rehabilitation – some areas had as little as 13 millimetres of concrete instead of the required 40 millimetres; and surface drains and groundwater reliefs being sealed over with GeoKrete at Church Street.

Contractors doing work for Melbourne Water – that is what they need to do, and there are groups that are checking that work using modern technology, sending down video surveillance and using video ability to check these drains and actually make sure that the work has been done to the standard and quality that is required. Sadly, a number of these groups were sacked by Melbourne Water because they came forward and said that the work had not been done to standard. There are massive problems in the drains, and who do you sack? Not the contractor firm that has done the work –

**Nick McGowan** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** but the whistleblower, that is exactly right. It is the whistleblower that has been shot by Melbourne Water.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** That is right, it is a vindictive government. It is a government that goes after the people who are blowing the whistle. So I say: will the minister please investigate what has gone on here? UAMTEC, the company that blew the whistle, is the one that is being shot, and we need to understand why the minister and the officials are supporting the people who have done the wrong thing.

### **Water safety**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:06): (1423) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education, and my ask is: how is your government's recent announcement of the \$73.4 million investment in swimming lessons going to uplift multicultural communities, who are among the most at risk when it comes to water safety, drownings and participation?

Over the summer months I have heard growing concerns from my constituents in the Northern Metro about the inaccessibility of swimming lessons. In our region a single 30-minute children's swimming lesson costs approximately \$21, adding up to \$210 per term per child. For families with multiple children this cost becomes a significant barrier to keeping their children and themselves safe in the water. Northern Metro is one of the most diverse and multicultural regions in Victoria, home to many migrants and refugees. For these communities, additional barriers can make it even harder to access swimming lessons. Language differences can make it difficult for families to sign up or fully understand what is being taught. Cultural expectations around swimming attire or mixed-gender lessons can deter families from participation. And for many, juggling work, child care and settlement challenges means they simply do not have time for lessons.

Tragically, we know that migrants and refugees are at higher risk of drowning. Life Saving Victoria's annual drowning report states that people born overseas accounted for 42 per cent of drowning deaths in Victoria. The government's announcement last December of 900,000 extra school swimming lessons is a positive step. Teaching kids to swim is essential. It saves lives. However, as the Greens

party spokesperson for multiculturalism and ageing I am concerned that this program may not reach many of those most at risk. Many migrants and refugees do not have access to school-based swimming programs. Too often they are left out of lessons because of financial, cultural or language barriers. It is clear there is a need to offer swimming lessons in community settings, not just within schools. This means ensuring there are culturally inclusive swimming instructors, translated materials and partnerships with community leaders to encourage participation. It is important that public pools and local swimming spots are welcoming and accessible for everyone. Water is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Water safety is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Every person, no matter where they come from, should have the chance to learn to swim and stay safe in the water.

Minister, my ask again is: how is your recent \$73.4 million investment in swimming lessons going to uplift multicultural communities, who are among the most at risk when it comes to water safety, drownings and participation?

### **Tobacco control**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (18:09): (1424) My matter is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Enver Erdogan, regarding the Allan Labor government's mismanagement of Victoria's tobacco licensing scheme. There is some confusion among retailers over delays surrounding the implementation of the tobacco licensing scheme. Despite the legislation passing in November last year, when the scheme was said to be operational in five months – around April 2025 – it has been revealed that licensing inspectors will not be checking for illicit tobacco until at least 2026, leaving honest retailers vulnerable to criminal elements. So the action I seek is for the minister to implement the tobacco licensing scheme with licensing inspectors operating this year as originally indicated. When the Allan Labor government fails to enforce its regulations, it fails all Victorians. Instead of cracking down on the illicit tobacco market, the Allan Labor government is giving it a free pass. While other states have made progress much quicker, Victoria is seen to be lacking. There is no enforcement and no department.

Legitimate retailers are confused and unprotected. This uncertainty comes in light of a significant increase in tobacco-related crime and a lack of support for legitimate businesses. Since March 2023 there have been over 130 firebombings in the state, with various criminals fighting to control the illicit tobacco market. An innocent bystander Katie Tangey, house-sitting for her brother, was caught up in the violent and dangerous underworld conflicts. She became a victim and paid the ultimate price at the age of 27. Meanwhile the black market continues to thrive as the Allan Labor government gives dangerous criminals a free 18-month trial run with no care for hardworking, genuine business owners. Victorians deserve better than a government that has mismanaged projects and delivered confusion, delays and a lack of enforcement. Can the minister provide a clear, transparent plan and implement the tobacco licensing scheme with licensing inspectors operating this year to address retailers' concerns?

### **Local government**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:11): (1425) This adjournment item is for the Minister for Local Government in the other place. Not even I anticipated how broad and fierce the backlash would be when I recorded a video with a resident of Hampton Park last week detailing the actions of Casey City Council. The resident Mike had representatives from the council come onto his property and seize three vehicles without warning or a warrant or providing any paperwork on the day. This was all done under local laws created by the previous administrators, who would not even shift times for the council meetings to a time when residents could reasonably attend, so perhaps it is little wonder that they have pushed through rules that require registration for things like working on your own car. But something happened when I highlighted Mike's issue. The phone in my office started ringing hot, and the emails started flooding in. There were stories of unsubstantiated allegations of a dog attack, leading to the dog being surrendered to an authorised officer and then euthanised in just three days. There have also been other stories about cars that were legally parked on the street being



towed away because of mistakes by other local councils and more, and I am starting to wonder just how common this sort of thing really is. Property rights are meant to be protected under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, but perhaps these protections are insufficient and need to be reassessed. There is clearly a large amount of community concern about the powers of local government authorised officers and how they treat private property. My request for the Minister for Local Government is to initiate an inquiry into Victorian local government laws and their enforcement.

### **Topirum Primary School Kindergarten**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:13): (1426) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Children, Ms Blandthorn, and the action that I seek is that the minister join me in visiting the new onsite kindergarten which opened this year, just a few weeks ago, at Topirum Primary School in Clyde North, in my region. Clyde North, as I regularly say in this place, is a very fast growing area, which is why we have invested in the new schools in the area, including the two primary schools that opened this year, the new secondary school that opened this year and indeed the new primary school that opened last year at Topirum itself. It is also why it is so important that we are making these investments in early childhood education facilities, such as kinders on school sites, here and in other parts of my electorate, including in Lysterfield. This is all part of the Allan Labor government's Best Start, Best Life reforms. Clyde North is home to aspirational growing families who will benefit from this new kinder, as they will from the new primary schools and the new secondary schools that we are building in the area, and indeed from the private schools that we are providing support to as well, including St Josephine Bakhita, the new Catholic primary school, and Clyde Grammar school, which I have already talked about this week.

We know that the benefit of avoiding the double drop-off for parents is immense, but it is also a huge benefit for kids in these kinders to be able to see their peers – their older brothers and sisters – playing just over that fence. We got to see indeed on a previous visit in the early stages of construction just how much there will be of that interaction when the younger kids can see their older peers playing. This will make it all the more comfortable for them to go and start their first few days in prep when they are already in their comfort zone. This is part of the Allan Labor government's unprecedented investment in young Victorians under Best Start, Best Life. The action I seek from the minister is that she join me in attending this wonderful new kindergarten in Topirum Primary School at Clyde North.

### **Kialla West Primary School pedestrian crossing**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:15): (1427) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to advise the Kialla West Primary School community if the government has plans to upgrade the school's pedestrian crossing and drop-off and pick-up points to improve safety for students and families before the new co-located early learning centre opens. The Victorian government has announced that it will build the new early learning centre on the site of the existing Kialla West Primary School. Co-locating early learning centres on primary school sites is a very good policy. It is a policy that I invested in as the minister for early childhood because it provides children with a smoother transition to primary school and it makes the drop-off and pick-up more convenient for parents. However, care must be taken to ensure that a big jump in student numbers does not raise risks to pedestrian safety around Kialla West Primary School, and that means upgrades must be made to the school's pedestrian crossing, parking and access points.

The early learning centre is due to open in term 1 of 2026, and the rise in student numbers will result in increased car traffic along the Goulburn Valley Highway and the school's access roads during drop-off and pick-up times. This predicted rise in traffic has the potential to impact safety around the school, which already has a heightened risk. The school sits on the Goulburn Valley Highway, a major arterial road used by thousands of freight trucks every week. The highway drops from 80 kilometres down to 40 kilometres during drop-off and pick-up times, but the truth is that these signs are not always seen or heeded by visitors or even familiar locals.

I first spoke on the matter of safety at the Kialla West Primary School crossing in 2018, almost seven years ago, when a car picking up children from the school was hit by a truck at the school crossing, leaving a mother and three young students seriously injured. One of those students still suffers today from the consequences of that accident. I have raised this matter every single parliamentary year and today is the 23rd time that I have spoken on it in Parliament, and I will keep speaking about it as long as the Allan Labor government does nothing to improve safety for the school community and motorists. The early learning centre is due to open in 2026, and there must be upgrades to the school's access points if safety is to be maintained once student numbers and traffic increase. In reality that work should be done before construction of the early learning centre starts, as numerous builders, vehicles, trucks and equipment accessing the construction site will reduce the limited parking and impact significantly on the cemetery lane drop-off area. I call on the minister to ensure safety is improved at the school crossing and drop-off and pick-up points at Kialla West Primary School as a matter of urgency.

### **Goulburn Valley Highway, Numurkah**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:18): (1428) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to direct the Department of Transport and Planning to repair the deep potholes on the Goulburn Valley Highway south of the township of Numurkah. The Goulburn Valley Highway is the second-most complained about road by my constituents in my electorate of Northern Victoria. Of serious concern are large potholes in the southbound lanes south of the township of Numurkah. Frequented by hundreds of cars, trucks, motorcycles, passenger and school buses and farm machinery, the Goulburn Valley Highway is a vital thoroughfare from the Murray Valley Highway in the north to the Hume Freeway in the south. The state of the Goulburn Valley Highway has been a serious concern during my entire time in Parliament and before. My constituents have complained of damage to vehicles caused by the degrading road surfaces. In October last year the government announced a road maintenance blitz of \$964 million across the state, with 70 per cent of it to be used for regional roads. Well, it has been five months since that announcement and the roads in my region have only deteriorated more. So the action I seek is for the minister to direct the Department of Transport and Planning to repair the deep potholes on the Goulburn Valley Highway south of the township of Numurkah.

### **Donnybrook Road, Kalkallo**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:19): (1429) My adjournment is directed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I once again seek the action of the minister to urgently address and duplicate Donnybrook Road. As you know, President, I am on a bit of a reverse strike, speaking about Donnybrook Road every single sitting week. I shared my adjournment last week, inviting the minister to attend Donnybrook Road with me in peak hour. Actually, over 10,000 people in my community viewed my adjournment speech, so I thought, instead of continuing to ask the minister things, I would read out what local constituents are saying to me about Donnybrook Road.

Jacqui says:

It can take 20 mins to get from the freeway to the front of the first estate. The state of the road is abysmal and packing tens of thousands of people into an area before any roads have actually been factored into the equation seems to be normal for this government however it's ludicrous.

Andre agrees with my invitation to get you, Minister, onto Donnybrook Road at peak hour:

... get these ministers out here to experience the nightmare our road systems are!

Prashant says:

It's a nightmare to drive on Donnybrook road in the morning around 8am. It takes more than 20 mins to just cross the bridge and get on the freeway towards Craigieburn.

Jarryd says:

... the no U-turn at Kalkallo has done nothing. I was driving past many times today as well as getting diesel and I saw easily 100 cars doing U-turns.

Andrew says:

You've hit the nail on the head. I worked in Innovation Dr, I've been at a complete stand still on the highway with semis coming off the bypass. It's an accident waiting to happen, a serious accident.

Paul says:

The off ramps at Donnybrook rd are just gridlocked from 3pm onwards. Mornings to! Donnybrook rd East needs duplicating which includes duplicating the bridge. The Hume needs an extra lane both ways from at least Donnybrook rd.

Lhanie from Donnybrook says the community sees through the Big Build putting up a website for a future Donnybrook Road upgrade:

Investigations will probably start in late 2025 just in time for the next election.

Steven says:

Being a leader is about moments and you nailed this one for all residents ...

They are just some of the many hundreds of contributions my constituents made. Of course I remind the minister it was actually the Liberals when we were in government that duplicated the Mickleham side of Donnybrook Road. So on one side you have got a lovely four-lane highway because we struck a developer contribution plan with a developer who built basically all of Mickleham, but Labor in the building of the Kalkallo and Donnybrook side failed to do any of that because they do not like developer contribution plans. They reversed that arrangement. They like to collect all the money from the growth areas infrastructure contributions into Spring Street, where they let it sit and wait for two years for costs to increase. That is the example to the minister. The action I once again seek is for the minister to come out with me in peak hour to Donnybrook Road and then duplicate Donnybrook Road.

### Bail laws

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:23): (1430) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is to end the politicisation of bail laws and for any review of bail laws to be evidence based. Earlier this month the Premier announced that she had instructed the Attorney-General and the Minister for Police to review Victoria's bail laws. What this review would include is unclear, but the Premier shared a belief that there was a need to go further.

One of the most recent changes to tighten our bail laws only came into effect in December. To review these changes so soon is perplexing to say the least. It is fair to say that this government is constantly tinkering with bail laws. Often this tinkering results in perverse outcomes like, for instance, the doubling of the rate of Indigenous female imprisonment. Addressing these perverse outcomes requires tinkering with laws yet again, and we cannot rely on these changes to be made. This government dumped plans to improve the bail system for young people, and it dumped its promise to raise the age of criminal responsibility.

In the context of the Werribee by-election it was not surprising that some suggested the announcement of a review of bail laws was a political choice. I implore this government not to be tempted by a tough-on-crime approach that seems to have all the answers but actually leaves us worse off. Motivators of crime are complex, as are the ways to address them. We need to be directing our attention to things like the drop in high school attendance to an all-time low, the substantial increase in family violence incidents, the increased wait times for mental health support and the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. We want to be clear that people deserve to feel safe, and a lot of people are not feeling that way at the moment. But if we want to improve, we need to look at what is motivating people to commit crimes. A tough-on-crime stance and responding with an unnecessary review of bail laws is lazy and

ineffective, so I ask: will the Premier commit to ending the politicisation of bail laws and ensure any review of bail laws is evidence based?

### School retention rates

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:25): (1431) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to take action to address the appalling situation in our schools at present, where student grades are at a 10-year low, more than two in 10 students fail to continue through to year 12, only one in four students complete year 12 and 15 per cent of high school students fail to turn up to school each day. That information came from the *Financial Review*. The issues that are affecting attendance rates include bullying, stress and anxiety in Victorian schools, and we now have record low attendance rates. These problems are aligned with the fact that schools are stretched, with staff shortages and inadequate resources. According to the *Herald Sun*, the Productivity Commission's recent report of last week shows that overall 58 per cent of Victorian state school students in 2024 from years one to 10 only attended school at least 90 per cent of the time – that is right, only attending at least 90 per cent of the time. This indicates that students have missed more than one day of school a week, which is up from a 49 per cent rate two years ago.

Minister, students in low socio-economic areas such as many parts of the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region are even worse off, because when they do not keep up their schooling their mental health risks are exacerbated and their job prospects are diminished. Poverty and disadvantage are highly correlated to poor attendance and dropping out before year 12, according to Nigel Howard, lecturer in education at the University of South Australia. He also went on to say that half of all people who go on to develop serious mental illness in later life dropped out of high school. The report shows that only 65 per cent of the 65,000 Victorian students who left school in 2023 were engaged in work or study or a combination of both in 2024. That is 35 per cent of the 65,000 Victorian students that are not engaged in work or study. That is more than 20,000-plus Victorians.

Victoria's figures show that our state schools had the second-lowest Commonwealth and state expenditure per student, with general expenditure being \$24,447 per student, but with the Victorian government only committing \$19,628 per state school student – also the second-lowest contribution Australia-wide. Keeping our children in government schools shows a high retention problem, and since 2017 public school retention rates in Victoria have dropped from 79.8 per cent in 2017 to just 73 per cent of public school students completing year 12. This is in stark comparison to the nearly 90 per cent non-government school retention rate of 87.2.

The government needs to address education in our state immediately because our children are suffering. We are sick of glib reports that all is well. All is not well in Victorian state education. When we look at the attendance rates of the children, these are very real problems. Minister, I ask you to show me that the government is doing something to address this very real and concerning problem.

### Flood mitigation

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:28): (1432) My adjournment is for the Minister for Water. Many Victorian communities are dismayed at the Allan Labor government's refusal to support levee maintenance in their response to the recommendations of the inquiry into the 2022 flood event in Victoria. Their response is just 'Let's have another review,' which is frustrating and dangerous to local communities. Given that levees provide an estimated 80 per cent of flood mitigation protection, these communities are requesting that as basic flood mitigation works these levees be immediately restored to their original integrity and then maintained through a legislated inspection and maintenance program. The relevant catchment management authority or any other designated authority would properly fund and manage such projects. This is an absolutely reasonable request as another inquiry could be years away, thereby leaving those communities exposed in the next flood.

Flood-impacted levees need urgent attention, and where there is a community benefit rural levees need to be upgraded to today's design standards through shared state and federal government funding.

These levees have been physically and electronically assessed during the 2022 floods, so now is the time to refurbish them while the information is current, and with most of our rivers at low levels now is the optimum time to proceed.

The stress and anxiety of local residents as they observed, patrolled and struggled to manage the rising river levels against the poorly maintained levees is difficult to put into words. Attention to these levees now would also remove the huge cost of government services during flood events, such as the state emergency services, fire services, flood rescue, police and the Australian Defence Force personnel, who did a fantastic job of sandbagging the low areas of the degraded levees. Will the Allan Labor government do the right thing and immediately refurbish these levees as a positive flood prevention program rather than simply sitting on their hands and fobbing off those exposed communities with another inquiry?

### School saving bonus

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:30): (1433) I have very much looked forward to this moment, because one manager of school business after another has said to me, ever since the announcement of the school saving bonus, what a burden it has placed on them. These are the managers of each school, predominately female in terms of the workforce, it is fair to say. The overwhelming feedback from my electorate of Ringwood – but right across the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, I am hazarding a guess, and I would guess also even in Minister Erdogan's area as well – is that the administrative burden that that bonus has placed on schools is extremely significant. It is no small matter. In fact from what I understand of local schools, any number of managers of those schools have been in tears. It has not taken hours, it has not taken days, it has literally taken weeks to administer this program.

You have to go back a step, because when this program was announced what we learned through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee process was this: there was not a scrap of evidence that they had actually consulted the bureaucracy prior. The bureaucracy in fact said at the time, and Secretary Atta was before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, that the system would most likely be a voucher-based system. Well, that never, ever eventuated. Instead what we have is complicated, last-minute scrambling by the department to try and catch up with this chaotic government and their ministers and their harebrained ideas.

There is no-one in this chamber that does not support sincere and true cost-of-living relief, but this is not what this is. This is an administrative burden placed in the way of and administered by schools, with no forethought and little respect for the time and resources it would take each and every single school in our state, particularly primary schools. If this government and this minister do not understand the amount of stress, the amount of worry and the amount of genuine inconvenience – and that this inconvenience represents time not spent on all the other matters every school has to deal with day in, day out, including the welfare of the students these schools are charged with – then they are absolutely kidding themselves. You also have to recall that this is fudging the finances, because at the end of the day this government has already signed up to the National School Reform Agreement. What we learned, again through the PAEC process is that the schools always had to spend the money.

In closing, I would say to every parent out there who is listening: make sure that you claim every cent you can, because I tell you what, just as in the story of Cinderella, the wand was waved and the pumpkin turned into a carriage, but come June, you will lose that saving bonus.

### Community safety

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:33): (1434) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health. There were 680 code blacks last financial year in our hospitals. Code blacks are the most serious violent issues that happen in our hospitals. They can be anything from threatening staff with knives to choking to throwing equipment. There has been even more aggression reported. It is happening at a frequency of every 12.8 hours – armed or serious threats

every 12.8 hours. That is inexcusable. It is unacceptable in every way, and still the government have not been able to deal with this issue, even though they come in here and say they are tough on this and they are tough on that and they are not accepting this. They do nothing. They just talk about it, and they do absolutely nothing.

**Nick McGowan** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** They did not want PSOs, Mr McGowan, that is right. They called them 'plastic police'. They do a brilliant job. We had a doctor murdered just a few years ago after being attacked outside Box Hill Hospital. This level of violence and aggression cannot be tolerated. In an article that was provided over the summer break, where this was really highlighted, the health department consistently refused to release the data to the journalist. They finally got the data. The department tried to block the release for several months, and the data showed that some patients were automatically a code black and had to be acted upon.

The point here is that this should not be happening, and the government should be up-front about what is actually happening in our hospitals. We have seen with the antisemitism the appalling lack of leadership. We have seen the lack of leadership in addressing this very serious issue, and the government collates some information on these serious incidents but not all. So the action I am asking for is that the minister instruct the Department of Health to collate this important data and in the interests of transparency that it be published on the department's website every month so that we can actually understand what is happening in our hospitals, what is happening with these violent threats against staff and patients, so that we can get a handle on it and action can then be finally taken.

### Planning policy

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:36): (1435) My question is for the Minister for Planning and reflects a concern I have heard from numerous constituents in recent years. It relates to the meaning of the term 'proposed' in reference to developments, particularly renewables developments. There seems to be considerable confusion and inconsistency in how this term is understood, and it would be helpful to have a clear statement on the matter from the minister. Across Western Victoria, various projects have been proposed by proponents, and information about their intentions has been made public by the companies involved. Yet as far as the communities are aware, these projects have not gone through any stage of the planning process. They have not gained permits to commence work, nor have larger projects begun the EES, the environment effects statement, process. Local residents, however, are denied permission to build on their own land on the basis of proposed developments, which would create a setback distance encroaching upon these residents' private property. In one case in the Buloke shire a resident who had already been granted permission to build on his land now sees his permit contested by the proponent at VCAT.

The action I seek from the minister is the production of a brief and authoritative statement which would provide clarity for residents, councils and project proponents, including answers to these questions. How can residents confirm if a proponent has a permit to build or has applied for a permit? At what point does a project become proposed? Do project proponents have the right to stop residents from erecting dwellings or making improvements on their own land if the proponents do not yet have a permit to build? Why are 1-kilometre buffer zones enforced on neighbouring land where owners have not signed up to host or be involved in a development and who gain no benefit at all in exchange for these substantial restrictions on their private property? Is the financial impact on a neighbouring property, in the form of increased insurance premiums due to increased fire risk or any other factor insurers may identify, a relevant factor in judgement of a planning application in the same way that other impacts on neighbouring properties – for example, visual amenity – are considered? These are the questions I ask the minister to answer.

**Responses**

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:39): There were 15 matters today: Mr Welch to the Premier; Mr Davis to the Minister for Water; Ms Gray-Barberio to the Minister for Education; Mr Luu to me – Mr Luu, I might take those specific matters in relation to our new tobacco laws and regulations on notice and give you a written response, if that is okay; Mr Limbrick to the Minister for Local Government; Mr Galea to the Minister for Children; Ms Lovell to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety; Mrs Tyrrell to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety; Mr Mulholland to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety; Ms Payne to the Premier; Mrs Hermans to the Minister for Education; Mrs Broad to the Minister for Water; Mr McGowan to the Minister for Education; Ms Crozier to the Minister for Health; and Mrs McArthur to the Minister for Planning. I will make sure that all of those matters raised will be referred to the relevant ministers for an appropriate response.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 6:40 pm.**