

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 20 May 2025

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Tuesday 20 May 2025

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (12:05): My question is to the Premier. Thousands of everyday Victorians, including CFA volunteers and career firefighters, are protesting on the steps of Parliament for the third time in two weeks over Labor's unfair emergency services tax cash grab. Why won't the Premier listen to the very people she claims to be helping and, like the Nationals and Liberals, commit to scrapping this tax?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour. Further members will be removed from the chamber without warning.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:06): I thank the leader of the Liberal–National coalition. Just confirming, do we have any announcements? Do we have any announcements to make today? We know where your heart truly beats, member for Gippsland South, on these questions, we truly do. The Leader of the Opposition asked a question about the emergency services volunteers levy, which, as I went through on previous occasions, is an existing mechanism that was introduced by I think the member for Malvern when he was Treasurer as a result of the recommendations of the Black Saturday royal commission. So when the leader of the Liberal–National coalition for today asks me about who we are listening to, since 2009, since those devastating fires, we have listened to the victims of those fires, the victims of those floods, the victims of those storm events and have understood that since that time more has been asked every month of our volunteers.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier when answering the question has to be factual. John from Kaniva out the front was saying he goes to more and more –

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. All members are required to be factual.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is a fact that 173 people lost their lives in that devastating Black Saturday fire. It is a fact that there was a royal commission into that fire. It is a fact that that royal commission recommended a levy that the former Treasurer introduced, and we supported that levy. We supported that recommendation at that time.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition! The member for Malvern can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Malvern withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition asked who we have been listening to. I will share with the Leader of the Opposition who we have been listening to. The member for Kew wrote to the Minister for Emergency Services asking for more support for the Whitehorse State Emergency Service. The member for Lowan wrote to the Minister for Emergency Services asking for more support for the Stawell State Emergency Service.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It is a very narrow question about their big new tax. Will they commit to the Liberals and Nationals commitment to scrapping the tax?

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business knows that a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier is not debating the question. She is clearly setting out the facts in relation to the many representations that have been made by those on the other side to government seeking more support for our emergency services volunteers, and that is what we are delivering.

Danny O'Brien: On the point of order on the question of debating, Speaker, none of us on this side asked the Premier to put in a new tax to support the SES.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I thank the Leader of the National Party for making the exact point I was about to make. It is so typical of those opposite to say one thing on Main Street in Stawell and another thing here in Spring Street.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Nationals and member for Nepean, this is your last warning.

Jacinta ALLAN: You cannot ignore the fact that more and more is being asked of our emergency services, our state emergency services, which is why taking the existing mechanism and providing them with that support is what we have done.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (12:10): Premier, the Treasurer claimed yesterday there are no new taxes in today's budget. Will the Premier acknowledge that without the emergency services tax that imposes a \$2 billion hit on Victorians, which was pushed through by the Labor government last week, her budget would still in fact be in deficit?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:11): The Treasurer also yesterday announced that today's budget will deliver the first operating surplus since before the pandemic. Also I say this to the Leader of the Opposition: you cannot commit to ripping away hundreds of millions of dollars from our emergency services without finding it from somewhere else, and that is the bit that the Liberal Party are denying to say to Victorian communities. Which hospitals are they going to cut? Which schools are they going to close? Those opposite have form. They cut funding to the CFA, they cut funding to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and they will do it all again.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is misleading the house. She is also debating the question. I would ask you to ask her to come back to the narrow question.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: community pharmacists

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:12): The Allan Labor government is investing in making our hugely successful community pharmacist program a permanent feature of the Victorian healthcare system. This program is all about easing the cost of living for Victorian families and making it easier for

Victorians to get the care that they need in their local communities, because our government is focused on what matters most to all Victorians.

Just this morning I joined the Premier with pharmacy owner George Tambassis, who is also the president of the guild, at his pharmacy in Richmond. There we were able to announce that the Allan Labor government will be investing an additional \$18 million to make this program a permanent feature of our healthcare system. Unlike other states, there will be no charge for Victorians who are accessing treatment and care from their local pharmacy.

The program has already proved, as I said, hugely successful, with more than 830 pharmacies having delivered more than 45,000 consultations since the program commenced. The program has been an absolute game changer for women, delivering more than 19,000 consults for the treatment of uncomplicated UTIs and seeing more than 10,000 women for the resupply of the pill.

We will also be working with experts and clinical groups to enable even more treatments to be delivered by our community pharmacists. At the moment we have five conditions that can be treated by community pharmacies. We are working to expand that to 22, and this will include common complaints – things like nausea, reflux, school sores – as well as chronic disease management. This will absolutely reduce the burden on our hardworking GPs and allow them more time to focus on the delivery of care for more complex conditions. Only an Allan Labor government can be trusted to continue to deliver on what matters most for Victorians.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:14): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. 250 Country Fire Authority brigades are offline in protest and thousands of volunteers are rallying today against the state government's emergency services tax. Does the minister support the tax or the volunteers?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will not tolerate this level of noise in the chamber. Members will come to order.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (12:15): I thank the Leader of the Nationals –

Jacinta Allan interjected.

Vicki WARD: for now – for his question to me. It is actually a really interesting cultural approach that we see here, where there is quite a binary frame set to this: do you support one or the other? What is intrinsically misunderstood, and some might say deliberately so, is that the two actually work together. This fund is there to support our emergency services, and this includes our incredible volunteers, both the CFA and, for the first time, the SES. We support our emergency services on this side of the chamber. We support our volunteers on this side of the chamber, and this is why this fund –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order on the question of relevance, Speaker, if this is supporting emergency services and volunteers, why are they on the front steps protesting against it?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Vicki WARD: Since becoming minister, in the various brigades and SES units that I have visited they have consistently said to me – and in fact I think that all of our members here, when they go out to visit their brigades and their units, will hear the same thing: 'We are having more demands on our responses. We have to get out more. The challenges are more complex. There is more we have to do. Can we please have more support? We need new appliances.'

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Kew, you can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Kew withdrew from chamber.

Vicki WARD: ‘We need better facilities. We need more support.’ And this is exactly what this government is doing: giving that support.

Danny O’BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:18): Even the CFA acknowledged in a letter to members yesterday that these protests were ‘a clear signal of discontent’ over the government’s new tax. What is the minister doing to address volunteers’ concerns, scrap the tax and get brigades back to doing what they do best: serving their communities?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (12:18): At the risk of being accused of womansplaining, you are entitled in Victoria to protest. You are entitled in Victoria to have the time to go out into a community, on the steps of this Parliament or wherever you might want to be to talk about something which either you support or you do not, and that includes people across the state regardless of what they do, including volunteering, and we respect their ability to do that.

Danny O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on a question of relevance, the minister was asked what she is doing to get these brigades back to serving their communities.

The SPEAKER: I am aware of the question, Leader of the Nationals. There is no requirement for you to repeat it. I ask the minister to come back to the question.

Vicki WARD: We are doing a great deal to support our CFA, as we are across our emergency services. If those opposite had actually read the media release that has been put out that talks to, for example, CFA brigades across Victoria, there are one, two, three, four, five, six, seven – I have run out of time.

Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:20): The Allan Labor government has a strong track record in building transport infrastructure, in creating jobs and of course in boosting transport services as well. On this side of the house we are a party of builders, not blockers. We build the infrastructure needed to support our state to grow, because the fact is new infrastructure is all about unlocking more services for Victorians.

A decade ago we started investing in the Metro Tunnel, which will open later this year, a year ahead of schedule, and this project is the biggest transformation of our network since the opening of the city loop over 40 years ago. The Metro Tunnel was always about delivering more trains more often, freeing up capacity to deliver the services our community will need over time. This year we are continuing to do the work to unlock more services by getting on with works at Sunshine, the first stage of airport rail and the first stage of the Melton line electrification, untangling that complex rail junction and enabling more services not just to the western suburbs but to the western region as well. Two years ago we introduced the regional fare cap, and that has returned more than \$130 million to household budgets across the state. Now this year we are building on that to deliver free weekend travel for seniors anywhere in the state. The member for Rowville will be looking forward to that.

All of the transport investment in this year’s budget is possible because of the decade of investment in transport infrastructure, in services and in fare reform that came before it. Those opposite have opposed the Metro Tunnel, they oppose the works at Sunshine and they oppose the extra services that have been enabled by those projects. On this side of the house we are investing in livability, we are putting money back into household budgets and we are getting Victorians to where they need to go.

Budget 2025–26

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:22): My question is to the Premier. This government has consistently overspent its own budget projections by an average of \$14 billion each and every year. Given this significant gap between the government's spending forecasts and its actual outcomes, why should Victorians have any confidence in the government's budget, fiscal plan or ability to manage money?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:23): I thank the member for Brighton for his question, and I thank the member for Sandringham for his intellectual property contribution to the member for Brighton's question today. The member for Brighton has given me an opportunity to remind him and the house that today's state budget will deliver the first operating surplus since before the pandemic. It will also confirm that we will be delivering steps 1, 2 and 3 of the fiscal strategy that we outlined. During that really difficult period of the pandemic we outlined a fiscal strategy that was focused on growing the economy, growing jobs, supporting the community, investing in frontline services and delivering an operating surplus this year, which has been achieved. The budget will also confirm how we will be delivering on future steps over the forward estimates period.

We have done this as a result of both making a range of responsible decisions but also at the same time understanding right now that working people and families around the state, like they are around the country, are looking for support. They are feeling those cost-of-living pressures. They are experiencing them every single day, which is why, by making the responsible decisions, by focusing on what matters for families and by looking at how we invest in frontline services, we have been able to not only deliver against the fiscal strategy that we outlined –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. She has not yet touched on the \$14 billion in average blowouts each and every year.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is being relevant. She is not debating.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course that is where I was going to. I was pointing out the achievement of the fiscal strategy, whilst at the same time that investment that the member for Brighton talks about is going into hospitals. \$11.1 billion is going to be invested in supporting our hospital system. It means that we can open the brand new hospital in Maryborough, and I visited that brand new hospital in Maryborough recently with the member for Ripon. Maryborough is one of the most disadvantaged communities in our state, and they deserve the best hospital infrastructure so they can get that quality care close to where they live. That is what investing in frontline services looks like, member for Brighton, and today we have seen no starker choice for the Victorian community: investing in frontline services, investing in real cost-of-living support, or those who have already said they will cut. They will have to cut to deliver their commitments to the Victorian community. We choose to invest in those things that matter to working people and families.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:26): Spending under this government has grown by 7.2 per cent on average, but in the most recent budget update the government has forecast spending to grow at 0.2 per cent in the next financial year. Does the Premier stand by this figure?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:26): We have seen an increase in investment by the government. Do you know where it has gone? It has gone into all those nurses who now work in our hospitals. It has gone into those additional teachers who work in our schools. It has gone into the additional child protection workers who work in our system. It has gone to supporting families with free kinder and with free TAFE. That is what government investment looks like. The member for Brighton has let the mask slip and shown the true Liberal that he really is – a Liberal that cuts, a Liberal that closes, a Liberal that hurts Victorian families and working people.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, question time is not a time for the Premier to attack the opposition. I would ask you to ask her to desist doing so.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I was simply explaining to the member for Brighton that, when he talks about that increase in government expenditure like it is a terrible, horrible thing, it is investing in teachers, nurses, police and child protection workers, who our community relies on.

Ministers statements: Get Active Kids voucher program

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (12:28): I rise to update the house on our investment to make community sport more accessible for Victorian families. Our Get Active Kids voucher program provides eligible families with up to \$200 to cover the cost of uniforms, equipment and registration fees, and I am very pleased to announce that the budget will deliver more vouchers for more children, with \$15 million to extend the Get Active Kids voucher program for another two years.

When we introduced the program in 2020 we committed to delivering 100,000 vouchers to Victorian families, and thanks to continued investment by this government, we have distributed almost 190,000 vouchers, which are making a real difference. More than half of the families who received vouchers in the most recent round of the program reported that their kids would not have been able to participate in their sport without a voucher. With more than 70 sports and 2100 registered activity providers, it does not matter what your game is. We are making it easier for kids to play.

These vouchers are not just great news for participants, they are also great news for clubs. By registering as a provider, grassroots sporting clubs get more memberships and more kids taking up sports that they otherwise may never have tried. Every professional athlete started somewhere, and these vouchers are opening up a world of opportunity for kids who might otherwise miss out. Our government believes that children, no matter their background or circumstances, deserve a chance to participate in the sport that they love. That is why the Allan Labor government remains focused on what matters for families, breaking down the barriers of cost and making community sport accessible for all.

Economic policy

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:29): My question is to the Premier. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Victoria's gross state product fell by 1.2 per cent per capita last year. Premier, why is Victoria in a per capita recession under this government?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:30): I thank the member for Brighton for the preview of his budget reply speech. If this is the kind of quality we are being dished up, bring back the member for Sandringham. The member for Brighton is not correct, and if he wants to talk about ABS statistics, let me share some statistics with him. In Victoria we are leading the nation for building, completing and approving more homes than any other state. That is a hot tip; you can include that, member for Brighton, in your budget reply. I will let you have that one.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, Premier.

Jacinta ALLAN: Sorry, Speaker. We will let you have the one that talks about how business investment in Victoria is growing more than in any other state.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, why are we in a per capita recession under a Labor government? Why?

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I thought I saw on telly on Sunday night the member for Brighton explaining the budget papers to the Leader of the Opposition. Perhaps we need to offer the member for Brighton a briefing from our Treasury officials, with comments like that. We have worked hard making responsible decisions that are about delivering an operating surplus, that are about delivering on our

fiscal strategy and investing in those frontline services that working people and families rely on, whilst also at the same time delivering real cost-of-living support for families right now. Free public transport for every kid everywhere every day is going to save families hundreds if not thousands of dollars a year, and we can only do that because we built the public transport network that we have today – the train lines, the tram services, the bus services. You can only deliver free public transport for kids, you can only deliver free public transport for seniors on weekends, if you have invested in your public transport network. That is what this budget is about.

We appreciate that those opposite will run their narrative, which is false. But not only that, it is a narrative that exposes the truth behind every single Liberal: they will cut. They have done it before, they will do it again. If you would like a contemporary example, Speaker – I know you are looking for me to provide you with a contemporary example – the Leader of the Opposition supports cutting funding to Sunshine station, which would deliver airport rail and which would deliver services to the west. We will invest in frontline services. We will provide real cost-of-living support and deliver a budget that sets up our state for the future.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:33): Can the Premier confirm that gross state product per capita going backwards is a direct breach of the government's own fiscal strategy to restore economic growth?

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:34): I heard the Minister for Finance saying that he would provide a briefing to the member for Brighton. I am sure he would be delighted to provide a briefing to the member for Brighton on today's state budget – a budget that delivers the fiscal strategy, delivers an operating surplus, delivers \$11 billion of additional investment in our health and hospital system and delivers on setting our state up for the future. And when you are setting our state up for the future and having and supporting a strong and growing economy, we are also investing in that. I am not going to reveal that right now for the member for Brighton. The Treasurer will have more to say about that in just a few moments. But we are backing a growing economy, because do you know what that means? It means increasing jobs. It is more jobs, and behind every job, behind every one of those ABS statistics, is a worker. And behind every single one of those workers is a family that is relying on that pay packet coming home, and that is exactly who we are backing with this budget.

Ministers statements: education system

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (12:35): Soon the Treasurer will hand down her first budget. It will be a budget focused on easing the pressure for hardworking Victorians. It will be a budget focused on making sure that no matter your background, no matter your postcode, you will have every opportunity to succeed, because we know on this side of the chamber that a budget is not just a balance sheet; it is a statement of values. On this side of the chamber we are about more than just words; we are about deeds.

That is why this budget will make sure that it continues a record investment in building the Education State, because on this side of the chamber it should not be your parents' wage, it should not be your postcode – everyone should have world's best practice in the classroom. We will continue to roll out best practice in the classroom in every corner of the state. We will continue to make sure that every student, as the Premier says, has access to school. We know travel poverty is one of the key issues that stops young people getting to school – that basic human right of getting an education and having that powerful weapon to transform your life. That is why this budget, as the Minister for Public and Active Transport has highlighted, puts free public transport at the heart of students.

I am also proud of our investment in the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund. The Victorian Council of Social Service has just said, on that additional funding for camps, sports and excursions:

Great to see a pre-Budget announcement of further, smartly-targeted investment in the Camps, Schools and Excursions Fund ...

In a cost-of-living crisis, this will make a real difference for children and young people's participation in school and in the community.

The community sector has long been focused on this. This is a big shout-out to the VCOS members and everyone that has fought hard to get additional funds for camps, sports and excursions so that no child misses out, so every child can get the opportunity to visit places in Melbourne and they can go on camp, they can go to Canberra. Imagine being a child that would miss out on that. Under the Allan Labor government, no child misses out, and that begins with education.

Small business support

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (12:37): My question is to the Minister for Small Business. In the government's economic growth statement announced on 10 December, the minister stated:

We're cutting unnecessary red tape for small businesses in Victoria ...

Specifically, what red tape for small business has the minister and this government cut?

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (12:38): I thank the member for that question in relation to supporting small business and of course reducing red tape so it makes it easier for businesses in Victoria to actually do business. And the member quoted correctly. As part of our economic growth statement it sets out practical support and steps for businesses and in particular our government to back small business, cutting that red tape, building new skills and reaching out to every community in Victoria. That includes businesses, and we know –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I know the minister is reading the notes that the Premier just wrote for her, but we are asking specifically what has been cut red tape wise by the minister.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Natalie SULEYMAN: I know that they are not interested in supporting small business on the other side of this chamber. When talking about supporting small business, we only hear the other side talk small business down in this state. Let me repeat what we will be doing when it comes to reducing red tape for small businesses. One example is reducing and streamlining liquor licensing, which will save small businesses \$7000 straight into their pockets. That is exactly what small businesses have been telling us. Let me tell the chamber that when it comes to supporting small business and reducing red tape, on this side we have been visiting so many small businesses face to face, talking about the issues and the challenges that they are facing. Whether that is visiting small businesses or hosting forums for small businesses, on this side of the chamber we will continue to –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question asked what red tape is being cut.

The SPEAKER: If the member for Nepean had not been interjecting across the table, he may have been able to hear the minister's response. I was having trouble hearing. I do believe the minister was being relevant to the question.

Natalie SULEYMAN: As I have just clearly stated for the chamber and for the member, we will be reducing red tape, and that includes for liquor licensing, planning permits and –

Bridget Vallence: On a different point of order, Speaker, on relevance, over six months ago the minister said they were cutting red tape.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Natalie SULEYMAN: As I have indicated to the house, part of the red tape reduction supporting small business includes the liquor licensing, which is saving small businesses \$7000 each year. There

are a number of other measures, which include planning permits and outdoor dining as well, saving costs and reducing red tape.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order on the question of relevance, Speaker, the minister seems to be unaware that liquor licensing approvals blew out by 50 per cent last year.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Natalie SULEYMAN: As I said, we will be saving businesses up to \$7000 and of course reducing time – up to six months earlier – when it comes to reducing red tape. On top of that, there is an additional \$14 million allocated to the BAF to be able to support projects and streamline the processes. We know when it comes to supporting small businesses time and money are an absolutely critical part in making sure that business continues to receive support and thrive in this state.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (12:43): Business insolvencies in Victoria have increased by 19 per cent in the March quarter, and small businesses are subjected to the highest taxes in the country. Why is this Labor government making Victorian small businesses pay for a decade of debt, deception and financial mismanagement?

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (12:43): I reject the premise of the question. When it comes to supporting small business on this side of the chamber, we continue to see record – let me repeat, record – creation, and that includes over 124 businesses set up just last year, when it comes to creating small business. On this side of the chamber, we continue to support small business and talk up supporting businesses, whether that is reducing red tape or whether that is providing the right tools and training for small businesses so they can work through some of the changing dimensions when it comes to doing business in Victoria. On this side, we will continue to support small business, and what I encourage the other side of the chamber to do, instead of talking business down in this state, is support small business in Victoria.

Ministers statements: budget 2025–26

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:44): Today our Labor government will deliver a budget that backs working people and backs families. It will strengthen frontline services. It will make responsible decisions and provide real cost-of-living support when they need it the most, because in these challenging and uncertain times working people and families want security, and we are making sure that they get it. That is why this budget will deliver the biggest investment of cost-of-living help in our state's history: \$2.3 billion in targeted support to every corner of the state, made possible by responsible decisions and a clear focus on what matters most.

We are also, as we have said already today, helping with those everyday pressures – free public transport for kids, the \$100 power saving bonus targeted at those who need it the most, and free care at your local pharmacy. There is the work that the Deputy Premier mentioned, doubling the school camps and excursions fund and making sure that kids are not left on the sidelines with the Get Active Kids vouchers. Then there is, for the second year in a row, nearly \$1 billion that will be invested in our road network, with a significant amount of that funding going into our regional network, because not only are we investing in the suburbs and the city, we are investing in regional Victoria as well.

From a new hospital in Maryborough that has opened up to schools all across the state to the important work in backing our regional food shares, this is a budget that is focused on what matters most for working people and Victorian families.

Constituency questions

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (12:47): (1130) This morning on the steps of Parliament, in front of thousands of volunteer and career firefighters, farmers and everyday Victorians, we on this side of the

house made the commitment that a future Liberal government will repeal this government's emergency services tax. This is a tax from a Labor government that hits every single family, every single resident, every single business, every single commercial property and every single farmer in Nepean and right across this state. Labor cannot manage money, and it is Victorians that continue to pay the price. My question for the Premier is: will the Premier now match this side of the house – the Liberals and Nationals commitment – by repealing this big new tax that will hit every constituent in Nepean?

Yan Yean electorate

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:48): (1131) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. I am really proud that we will be delivering the Yan Yean Road stage 2 upgrade. We recently had the Premier there to announce that Decmil are the preferred contractor for that project. It is a well-anticipated project, and I know that seeing is believing. So I want to know, Minister, for my community: when will we see major works kick off for the Yan Yean Road stage 2 upgrade? We cannot wait to see it started.

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (12:48): (1132) My question too is for the Premier today. In the midst of one of the most crushing droughts in western Victoria's history, in light of the new fire services levy, which will impose an enormous cost on every household, every business, every industrial site and every farm throughout western Victoria, will this Premier commit to cutting that tax and restoring the levy that was there before, as the Liberal–National parties would, as a sign of respect for fairness and as a sign of respect for good government, and manage the budget in a way that people in Victoria expect a responsible government to? Or will the Premier continue with this unfair tax that is going to hurt families and going to hurt all Victorians? Worst of all, it will be a hit to the cost of living of every farm, every family and every business in the seat of Polwarth.

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (12:49): (1133) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. How will free public transport for children under the age of 18 support families in my electorate of Tarneit? I recently had the pleasure of speaking with students at Hoppers Crossing Secondary and The Grange P–12 College for the Youth Parliament program. These bright, thoughtful young people had bold ideas for the future, and when asked what law they would like to introduce into the Parliament, students at The Grange chose to reduce public transport fares. Many shared how hard it is for them to get to school when their families simply cannot afford the cost. No child should miss out on education because of their postcode or their parents' income. That is why I am so excited about the announcement of free public transport for children. Families across Tarneit feel the cost of fares every single day, especially those with multiple children and limited transport options. This investment will save families an average of \$755 per child per year.

Lowan electorate

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (12:50): (1134) My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier commit to scrapping the tax and making the commitment made on the steps of Parliament today by the Liberals and the Nationals? I was moved by the contribution by John Bennett of Kaniva, who has been absolutely smashed with the Little Desert fires; the impact on his property and his farm by dingoes, which have been going unabated, attacking his stock; and now he has been hit hard with the emergency services tax that has been put on him and other farmers across the state by Premier Allen and her city-centric Labor government. Our local people are sick to death of having all of their hard-earned funds taken away from them during a cost-of-living crisis. The Allan Labor government must agree to scrap this tax, particularly during a cost-of-living and a cost-of-business crisis, and stop Victorians from paying the price.

Greenvale electorate

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (12:51): (1135) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. It was great to be joined by the minister in Greenvale just last week to discuss the important investments we are making in vital transport infrastructure for our growing community, including stage 2 of the Mickleham Road upgrade and the expansion and enhancement of bus route 543. Minister, following the completion of extensive planning to identify the new route and new stop locations, how will the work now being undertaken to procure new buses and additional drivers, to construct new stops and to launch the route benefit residents in the Greenvale community, especially those living in the Aspect estate and other areas of Greenvale's north, which will be connected to the public transport network very soon for the very first time?

Ringwood electorate

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (12:52): (1136) My constituency question is to the Minister for Housing and Building in the other place. Minister, how many crisis accommodation beds are currently available in Melbourne's eastern suburbs? My office continues to receive a distressing number of calls from constituents in the Ringwood electorate experiencing housing distress. These are not isolated cases; they are people who have often been on the public housing waiting list for years with no end in sight. Many are sleeping rough, fleeing violence or managing serious mental health challenges. What they all have in common is the urgent need for a safe place to stay tonight, not in six months, not in a year – now. Too often they are told there are simply no local crisis beds available or there is no money to pay for them. This is simply not good enough. These are not rare or exceptional circumstances anymore; this is fast becoming the daily reality across Melbourne's eastern suburbs. We are in a housing emergency, and the need for immediate and accessible crisis accommodation has never been more pressing. This government must act.

Werribee electorate

John LISTER (Werribee) (12:53): (1137) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Werribee is getting a massive upgrade to our road network with a raft of infrastructure projects underway. Whether it is the Ison Road project's new overpass and extension, the Ballan Road intersection project, Wyndham ring road or the main road interchange, these upgrades will be transformative and will make a huge difference to how locals in my community get around. Werribee's west has seen an increase in traffic, and we are seeing commuters looking to exit the Princes Freeway at Werribee Main Road, leading to a traffic build-up on the freeway wanting to exit in the emergency lane – not an ideal situation, to say the least, and something that I have seen firsthand. Following advocacy by me and the federal member for Lalor, we celebrated the announcement of the main road interchange upgrade, jointly funded by the federal and state Labor governments. There have been discussions about a need for a temporary solution at the off-ramp to help ease this tailback while the broader works get underway. Minister, what steps are being taken to implement this temporary solution at the off-ramp?

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (12:54): (1138) My question is to the Treasurer. After the massive protest today, will the Treasurer provide information on whether or not they will now axe the emergency services tax affecting farmers, CFA volunteers, renters and families in the Mornington electorate and across Victoria? Liberals and Nationals will scrap this tax; Labor must do the same. This tax will drive up rates for households across the Mornington Peninsula and Victoria, hitting renters and families already struggling; punish our farmers, many in drought, and our CFA brigades like in Mount Eliza, Mornington, Moorooduc, Mount Martha and Baxter, and the SES; and be a slap in the face for the Peninsula Victorian Farmers Federation and emergency services volunteers, who have expressed serious concerns about this tax. Labor is out of touch with rural, regional and outer suburban Victoria and indeed all Victorians. Liberals and Nationals will scrap this tax. Labor, please axe this tax.

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (12:55): (1139) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport, and my question is: what programs or initiatives are available to support sporting clubs in Reservoir like Lakeview Tennis Club, who are looking to upgrade their lighting to get more people involved? Lakeview Tennis Club is located just north of Edwardes Lake on Leamington Street and has been a key part of the Reservoir community since its founding in the mid-1960s. Unfortunately its growth has been held back in recent years by the state of courts 5, 6, 7 and 8, particularly the lack of LED lighting to support its night competitions. I would like to pay tribute to club president Richard Cosway, who not only leads the organisation through all of the tournaments and events for their adult and junior members and of course for those locals who play casually through our book-a-court system but advocates tirelessly in Darebin for better facilities for their club. I know a lot of work goes into pulling together those quotes and grant submissions and advocating to all three levels of government. Any information the minister can provide, particularly with respect to coordinating support with Darebin council, would be greatly appreciated.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do have a point of order relating to questions on notice that are now overdue. They include numbers 2035, 2104, 2107, 2143, 2145, 2160, 2161, 2175, 2210, 2211, 2217, 2218, 2219, 2220, 2221, 2222, 2223, 2225, 2226, 2227, 2228, 2229, 2230, 2231, 2232, 2233, 2234, 2235, 2236, 2237, 2238, 2239, 2240, 2241, 2242, 2243, 2245, 2246, 2247, 2248, 2249, 2250 and 2251. To save the house, I have another page and a half of unanswered questions on notice that are now overdue, which I will make available to the clerks, and I would ask you to assist me in pursuing those questions from those ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you can, as you said, provide that to the clerks, I will inform the Speaker.

Bills**Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:58): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Financial Management Act 1994, the Constitution Act 1975 and the Local Government Act 1989 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:58): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:58): The Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 amends the Financial Management Act 1994 to ensure the financial framework of the state is fit for purpose and the public sector is resilient to future challenges. It also provides direction to departments and public bodies to ensure they are using resources in a fiscally sustainable way, having regard to the decisions of government and to proper financial management.

Read first time.**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025*Introduction and first reading*

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:59): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024, the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007, the Taxation Administration Act 1997, the Unclaimed Money Act 2008 and the Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:00): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (13:00): The State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025 amends Victoria's taxation laws to ensure they continue to operate as intended, including by amending the Duties Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007 and the Taxation Administration Act 1997. The bill also includes tax relief measures to support victim-survivors of family violence and extends the temporary off-the-plan stamp duty concession.

Read first time.**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.***Business of the house***Notices of motion**

The SPEAKER (13:01): General business, notice of motion 59, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing the matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing by 5 pm today.

*Petitions***Bairnsdale battery energy storage facility**

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) presented a petition bearing 706 signatures:

The petition of the residents of Victoria in objection to **Planning Application PA2503624 for Ballantine Solar Farm at 280 BENGWORDEN ROAD BAIRNSDALE VIC 3875.**

We draw to the attention of the House a number of concerns regarding the inappropriate siting of a solar and BESS facility, including the high fire risk with an insufficient buffer zone to the Bairnsdale Airport, DEECA air base and the Moormung Forest, as well as the potential water and soil contamination, which would threaten the Gippsland Lakes.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria;

***Provide an opportunity for community to raise its concerns in relation to this project and have them addressed prior to project approval and,**

***That the minister provide an avenue for community to have these matters addressed before ministerial departmental approval of the project.**

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**Heywood road safety**

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) presented a petition bearing 35 signatures:

Issue:

The residents of Heywood and surrounding areas are concerned about motorists speeding through the town, which poses a safety risk to pedestrians and other motorists and reduces the amenity of the town.

Action:

The petitioners therefore call on the government to reduce the speed to 40km in the main street of Heywood.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Documents

Budget papers 2025–26

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (13:02): I table, by leave:

2025–26 budget paper 1, ‘Treasurer’s Speech’;

2025–26 budget paper 4, ‘State Capital Program’; and

2025–26 budget ‘Overview’.

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Financial Management Act 1994:

2025–26 Budget Paper No 2 – Strategy and Outlook

2025–26 Budget Paper No 3 – Service Delivery

2025–26 Budget Paper No 5 – Statement of Finances (incorporating Quarterly Financial Report No 3)

2025–26 Budget Information Paper – Gender Equality Budget Statement

2025–26 Department Performance Statement.

Bills

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

Council’s agreement

The SPEAKER (13:03): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025, including the amendments made by the Legislative Assembly on the suggestion of the Legislative Council, without further amendment.

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025

Council’s agreement

The SPEAKER (13:04): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025 without amendment.

Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025

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

Royal assent

The SPEAKER (13:04): I inform the house that today the Lieutenant-Governor gave royal assent to the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025, the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025.

Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025*Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (13:04): I have received the following message from the Lieutenant-Governor, accompanied by the estimates:

In accordance with the requirements of section 63 of the *Constitution Act 1975* the Lieutenant-Governor, as the Governor's Deputy, recommends to the Legislative Assembly that an Appropriation be made from the Consolidated Fund for the purposes of a Bill for an Act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of the Government for the financial year 2025/2026 and for other purposes, and hereby transmits to the Legislative Assembly estimates of the Expenditure requiring annual appropriation in the financial year 2025/2026.

Estimates tabled.*Introduction and first reading*

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (13:05): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of the government for the financial year 2025–26 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time; under standing order 61(3)(a), ordered to be read second time immediately.

Statement of compatibility

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (13:10): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Appropriation (2025–26) Bill 2025.

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of Bill

The Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 will provide appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of Government for the 2025/2026 financial year.

The amounts contained in Schedule 1 to the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 provide for the ongoing operations of departments, including new output and asset investment funded through annual appropriation.

Schedule 2 of the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 contains details concerning payments from the Advance to Treasurer in the 2023/24 financial year.

Schedule 3 of the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 contains details concerning payments from advances made pursuant to section 35 of the *Financial Management Act 1994* in the 2023/24 financial year.

Human Rights Issues

The Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 does not raise any human rights issues.

As the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human rights and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter.

Conclusion

I consider that the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 is compatible with the Charter because it does not raise any human rights issues.

The Hon Danny Pearson MP
Minister for Finance

Second reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (13:10): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: In accordance with the resolution of the house on 15 May 2025, I ask the Serjeant-at-Arms to admit the Treasurer.

Serjeant-at-Arms admitted Jaclyn Symes (Treasurer) to chamber.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (13:11): I proudly begin my first budget speech by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of this land.

I pay my respects to elders, past and present.

The Allan Labor government is committed to truth, treaty and self-determination for First Peoples.

Speaker, around the world and here at home, families are making hard choices.

They're weighing up what they can go without and holding tight to what matters most.

This budget meets them at that moment – with care, with discipline, and with determination.

It delivers real help with the cost of living. It invests in the services people rely on.

And it does so with a clear and steady focus: backing Victorians not just through the challenges of today but for the opportunities of tomorrow.

We've been able to do that because we've made responsible choices, carefully weighing every decision and making sure every dollar goes where it matters most.

It means that with this budget, Victoria returns to surplus. We've done it while delivering record cost-of-living relief and backing the people who carry our state forward, because we know what nurses mean for a family waiting in emergency, what a good teacher can unlock in a Victorian child, what it means to see the police out in your community or to get an ambulance when you need it most – because these aren't just services; they're the building blocks of a fairer and stronger state.

It's why the Allan Labor government is focused on the things that matter most: real help with the cost of living, good hospitals, great local schools, safe communities, decent jobs, and opportunity wherever you live.

Our economy is strong. Over the past decade, Victoria has led the states in real economic growth, creating over 900,000 jobs and adding \$138 billion to Victoria's economy.

This budget continues to back Victorian business, with \$240 million to support further growth and investment, including the new \$150 million Victorian Investment Fund, with \$50 million dedicated to supporting jobs and investment in regional Victoria, and an additional \$35 million to deliver one-to-one advice and help more Victorians take their products to the world.

Speaker, in the last five years, more than 113,000 new businesses have been created in Victoria, the largest percentage growth of any state.

And that's absolutely something to celebrate.

But we also know that numbers like these don't tell the full story, because behind every job created and every dollar added are real people, and right now too many of them are doing it tough.

Families are counting every dollar. Parents are watching the price of groceries, petrol, rent, and bills inch higher week by week.

The cost of living has hit hard. And higher interest rates have only made it harder. That's why this budget delivers targeted, meaningful cost-of-living relief, because good governments don't look away when times get tough. They show up. In my first budget as Treasurer, I want Victorians to know this: we see you, we hear you, and we're doing something about it – because building a fairer Victoria starts with backing its people, and that's exactly what this budget is about.

Speaker, I was the first in my family to finish high school and go to university.

It wasn't easy – four of us, uni students from Benalla, crammed into a tiny unit in Burwood, working part-time jobs, eating noodles, studying together late into the night. Those years taught me something that I'm now extremely grateful for: that education opens doors. And importantly, it gives people the chance to imagine a bigger future.

And that belief – that every Victorian deserves hope and to dream big about their future – is at the heart of this budget.

It's why we're building and upgrading and planning new schools across our state, because every family should be able to rely on a great local school.

But we're not just building new classrooms; we're focusing on the learning inside of them too.

We've supported teachers to lift year 12 completion rates dramatically – from 92 per cent in 2021 to 97 per cent today – because we know finishing school sets people up for life.

The VCE vocational major is central to this. It mixes practical job skills with traditional subjects, giving students more choices about their future and more reasons to stay in school and have grand plans.

And we're taking that even further, investing \$27 million in dedicated pathway coordinators at government high schools.

These coordinators will help students find the right course, apprenticeship, or career, ensuring young people don't feel lost when planning their future.

We're helping more young Victorians discover a love of learning, including maths: upskilling maths teachers, introducing a new year 1 numeracy check and, for kids who really love maths, advanced maths camps free of charge.

We're completing the statewide rollout of our disability inclusion reforms, making sure every child is supported to be their best.

And we're continuing to expand free TAFE through 2026, making sure that Victorians can learn new skills or refresh old ones without worrying about money.

The Allan Labor government has not only made our public transport system stronger. We've made it cheaper for Victorians – not just for us out-of-towners but for those in Melbourne to get out of town to see and experience everything that regional Victoria has to offer.

Passengers have saved well over \$100 million since the introduction of our fairer regional fares.

But we can do better, and in this budget we are.

It's why we're making public transport completely free for every Victorian under the age of 18.

It's a huge help for families, saving them upwards of \$700 a year. And it doesn't stop there.

We're also expanding free weekend public transport for every seniors card holder in Victoria, allowing grandparents to enjoy time with family, or to get out and explore the state, without worrying about how much it might cost.

Speaker, budgets are about choices.

And in this budget, we have chosen to back Victorians with the services they need now, while planning for the kind of future Victorians want and deserve.

This budget represents a profound commitment to the people who keep our state safe, strong, and moving: our nurses, police, teachers, train drivers, apprentices and so many others.

With this budget, we're continuing to deliver the biggest investment in frontline staff and services as a share of workforce investment since 2019.

That's not just a percentage; it's a statement of our values.

It means \$203 million for self-determined health, education, employment, culture and other services for First Nations Victorians; another \$172 million to help victim-survivors of family violence with one-on-one support, for specialised legal services, and to back Respect Victoria to help prevent gendered violence before it begins.

It means looking after farmers, with \$900,000 to support the work of the National Centre for Farmer Health.

It means bigger, better care in Maryborough and Geelong.

It means real investment in emergency departments, mental health care, and faster ambulance response times.

It means a lot to me personally.

Last year, my mum spent five months in the public hospital system – in and out of the ICU and various medical wards at Royal Melbourne, as well as the medical and rehabilitation units at Northeast Health Wangaratta.

I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank our amazing healthcare workers. Because of them, and supported by our investments, we have a world-class health system.

I am incredibly proud that this budget reflects and builds on our track record, with funding for new hospitals and community hospitals across Footscray, Frankston, Craigieburn, Cranbourne and Phillip Island, ensuring more patients get the care they need sooner.

In fact, almost a third of this year's expenditure is dedicated to the health and wellbeing of Victorians and their kids, invested in our hospitals and healthcare workers.

We're also making it easier to access treatments normally only available through a visit to the doctor, by expanding the role of our pharmacists and making those consultations free.

It's cost-of-living relief that eases pressure on GPs and emergency departments and saves families both time and money.

Speaker, I want my first budget to give people hope.

For our youngest Victorians, that begins with opportunity, like the opportunity to join their classmates on camp, to play in a team, to feel like they belong.

These things should be a rite of passage, not a privilege.

But for too long, too many kids have missed out not because they didn't want to go but because their families simply couldn't afford to send them.

That's why this budget boosts our camps, sports and excursions support for eligible students to \$400.

This is what fairness looks like. That's what dignity feels like.

And it's the same principle behind our \$2 billion investment in early childhood education, delivering free kinder statewide for every three- and four-year-old, saving families around \$2600 per child.

It's about giving every child the best start in life and giving every parent the support they need to offer it, because when a child is welcomed, encouraged, and included from the very beginning they don't just learn, they grow. They thrive, and so does our state.

Just as we're backing our future generations, we're building for a growing state: a \$4.1 billion investment in the Sunshine station superhub; opening the West Gate Tunnel and Metro Tunnel, transforming travel across Melbourne and cutting commute times.

And with \$727 million, we'll be ready to run services through five new underground stations, with more services on the Sunbury, Pakenham and Cranbourne lines.

And because we've freed up the city loop, we can deliver more services on other lines, from Werribee to Sandringham, all while boosting V/Line trains to Bendigo, Traralgon and Seymour.

Building a livable Victoria isn't just about construction; it's about connection.

No family should ever have to choose between getting where they need to go and getting there safely.

Last year, the Labor government delivered one of Victoria's biggest single-year investments in road maintenance.

This year's budget goes further with a massive \$976 million to fix potholes, upgrade road surfaces and keep bridges and roadsides across Victoria safe.

We're also delivering a \$1.2 billion road blitz and improving safety with \$412 million for the next phase of our road safety action plan.

But it's not just how we move around the state that matters; it's where we live and how we live.

It's why we're cutting red tape, unlocking vacant government land and fast-tracking the renewal of public housing, to build more homes where people need them.

The Suburban Rail Loop is Australia's largest housing project. With Melbourne expected to reach the size of London by the 2050s, it will deliver 70,000 more homes on the doorstep of health care, education precincts and jobs.

In this budget, we'll encourage more new apartments, units, and townhouses by extending the stamp duty concession, slashing stamp duty on eligible off-the-plan homes until October 2026.

And wherever people choose to live, we're helping them save even more with our Solar Homes program.

Already, 300,000 homes have installed solar panels, saving up to \$750 a year.

This budget extends that success with rebates for electric heat pumps and solar hot-water systems, cutting energy bills by up to \$400.

And we're delivering a \$100 power saving bonus for households on a concession card, helping cover the cost of winter bills for those who really need it.

As a Labor government, it is in our DNA to support the most vulnerable in our community.

Hunger doesn't always look like what you expect.

Food relief agencies are seeing more full-time workers, people juggling rent and bills, needing help for the first time, so we're stepping up.

We're doubling our community food relief program.

It's an \$18 million investment that means more support for regional food shares in Albury–Wodonga, Geelong, Bendigo, Shepparton, Mildura and Warrnambool; additional grants to neighbourhood houses, community groups and volunteer-led organisations across Victoria to provide meals to

families doing it tough; and a \$3 million boost to Foodbank's Grow program, making sure surplus farm produce that would otherwise go to waste supports Victorians experiencing food insecurity.

We're backing Good Shepherd and its Good Money program with another \$5 million, providing interest-free loans when life throws you a curveball, because a broken fridge or a surprise bill shouldn't push a family to the edge.

This budget adds \$61 million to our investments in homelessness support to give more Victorians the safety and security of a home.

We're also supporting Mortgage Stress Victoria with an extra \$4 million so their team of lawyers, social workers, and financial counsellors can continue their quiet, vital work, because when a family is at risk of losing their home, it's not just about finances. It's about everything that home represents: the roof over your head, the school down the road, the place where your kids feel safe at night.

This support isn't about charity. It's about fairness, because dignity shouldn't come with conditions. And security shouldn't be reserved for the few.

It's something we all deserve and something good governments help protect.

We can deliver these investments because of our responsible approach to financial management.

With my first budget, we are firmly on track to deliver on the government's fiscal strategy.

The budget delivers an operating surplus in 2025–26 – the first since before the pandemic – with average surpluses of \$1.9 billion over the forward estimates.

By the end of the forward estimates, net debt is declining as a proportion of the economy.

These fiscal outcomes and our economic plan will help to ensure Victoria's economy continues to grow strongly and creates good secure jobs.

This is the beginning, not the end.

Families and businesses are carefully considering every dollar. They rightly expect their government to do the same.

It's why we commissioned an independent review of Victoria's public service, led by Helen Silver AO, to ensure spending is aligned with the needs and priorities of Victorians.

The final report will be received in June, but we're already acting. By stripping back inefficiency in government spending, reducing duplication and winding back non-priority programs, we have been able to invest in what matters most.

Speaker, this is a responsible budget. It delivers on our fiscal plan.

It returns Victoria to surplus.

It reduces net debt to GSP over the forwards.

And most importantly, it is focused on the core services that Victorians rely on.

It backs the state government's front line and helps them deliver excellence to the community.

And it provides real help with the cost of living: a cheaper power bill that brings some breathing room; a hot meal that reminds someone they are seen, cared for and important; a free V/Line trip that keeps a family close.

This is support you can feel – at the kitchen table, at the school gate, at the train station.

It's a budget delivered by a government that is on Victorians' side, because every choice in this budget is shaped by a deeper truth about the kind of Victoria we believe in, where opportunities are not limited by circumstance but expanded by choice – a fairer, stronger, more connected Victoria.

That's what we're building, and that's what this budget delivers. I commend this bill to the house.

Serjeant-at-Arms escorted Jaclyn Symes from chamber.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:30): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until tomorrow.

Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (13:31): I have received the following message from the Lieutenant-Governor, accompanied by the estimates:

In accordance with the requirements of section 63 of the *Constitution Act 1975* the Lieutenant-Governor, as the Governor's Deputy, recommends to the Legislative Assembly that an Appropriation be made from the Consolidated Fund for the purposes of a Bill for an Act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the Parliament in respect of the financial year 2025/2026 and for other purposes, and hereby transmits to the Legislative Assembly estimates of the Expenditure requiring annual appropriation in the financial year 2025/2026.

Estimates tabled.

Introduction and first reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:31): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the Parliament in respect of the financial year 2025–26 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:32): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:32): This is a bill to appropriate certain sums to enable the Parliament and our electorate officers and parliamentarians to function and be paid.

Read first time; under standing order 61(3)(a), ordered to be read second time immediately.

Statement of compatibility

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:34): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of Bill

The purpose of the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 is to provide appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament and its agencies in respect of the 2025–2026 financial year.

Human Rights Issues

The Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 does not raise any human rights issues.

As the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human rights, and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter Act.

Conclusion

I consider that the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 is compatible with the Charter because it does not raise any human rights issues.

The Hon Danny Pearson MP
Minister for Finance

Second reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:34): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 provides appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament and its agencies in respect of the 2025/2026 financial year, including ongoing liabilities incurred by the Parliament such as employee entitlements that may be realised in the future.

Honourable Members will be aware that other funds are appropriated for parliamentary purposes by way of special appropriations contained in other legislation. In addition, unapplied appropriations under the *Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Act 2024* have been estimated and included in the Budget Papers. Before 30 June 2025, the actual unapplied appropriation will be finalised and the 2025/2026 appropriations will be adjusted by the approved carryover amounts under section 32 of the *Financial Management Act 1994*.

In line with the wishes of the Presiding Officers, appropriations in the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 are made to the departments of the Parliament, and the independent officers of the Parliament.

The total appropriation authority sought in the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 is \$297 204 000 for Parliament in respect of the 2025/2026 financial year.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (13:34): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until tomorrow.

Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025**Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025***Concurrent debate*

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:35): I move, by leave:

That this house authorises and requires the Speaker to permit the second-reading and subsequent stages of the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 to be moved and debated concurrently.

Motion agreed to.

*Business of the house***Adjournment**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:36): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until Tuesday 27 May 2025.

Motion agreed to.**Program**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:36): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the order of the day, government business, relating to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, be considered and completed by 7 pm on 20 May 2025.

It is an unusual day, because we have only one sitting day, and that was to hear from our Treasurer and for the handing down of the Allan–Symes budget for this year – a Labor budget, a budget that really talks to our values – but we will also be getting on with business of the house, so I am pleased that we have one bill to keep us very busy today.

We will be debating the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This is an important bill, one that I know members on this side of the place look forward to speaking on. I anticipate that the Manager of Opposition Business will get on her feet only to oppose the government business program again, because quite frankly, it does not matter whether we are debating three bills or one – one thing we can almost always count on is that those on the other side will oppose our legislative program.

I can also anticipate that the Manager of Opposition Business will say that this is because we will not move to consider the bill in detail. I can explain to the house why we will not be doing that. That is because the minister is not in this chamber. The minister is in fact in the other chamber, and I suspect that the minister is doing what we anticipate all government members in the upper house are doing right now – that is, they will be out right across Victoria, across the suburbs of Melbourne and across the rural and regional towns, outlining our fabulous budget, the budget that has just been handed down by our Treasurer, Ms Symes from the other place.

Those of us who are working through today here in the chamber will be debating the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill is part of our government's commitment to lead the way across the nation in reforms that are designed to reduce gambling harm. We have already taken significant steps. That includes establishing the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, Australia's strongest gambling regulator, with enhanced oversight and enforcement powers. We have also introduced mandatory carded play for pokies at Crown, ensuring that players can track and manage their gambling. We have mandatory closure periods: all hotels and clubs must close gaming areas between 4 am and 10 am to reduce extended gambling sessions. We are currently making reforms to further reduce gambling harm and money laundering, including account-based play across EGMs in Melbourne; implementing load-up limits on Victorian pokies, meaning the amount of money an individual can put into an EGM is being capped at \$100, down from \$1000; and making it mandatory for all new electronic gambling machines to spin at a minimum rate of 3 seconds per game, slowing the pace of the game down and limiting the amount that can be lost.

With this bill our government is strengthening the regulation of gambling in Victoria. I know, as I said, that many on this side of the house will look forward to speaking in support of this bill, because as Minister for Health I might say I am very well aware of the health harms that gambling can cause. It is important and right that we support those who for a range of reasons sometimes find themselves with gambling addictions or otherwise in circumstances where they lose money that they simply cannot afford to lose.

I will be very interested indeed to find out why those on the other side of the house would oppose legislation that is designed to support Victorians and those that need government to stand with them and be on their side, because frankly that is what our Labor government is all about. We are on the side of all Victorians. Those on the other side are all about tearing Victoria down. They are all about –
(Time expired)

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (13:41): The Leader of the House could not say anything that is further from the truth. This Labor government – this tired, 10-year-old Labor government – is all about taxing Victorians more. We have just had the budget speech provided in the house, and of course, as we talk about this government business program, today is budget day. It is the day for the government and the Treasurer to deliver the budget, and the Treasurer came from the Legislative Council down into the Assembly to deliver that budget – a budget that taxes Victorians more. The Treasurer is trying to pull the wool over Victorians' eyes by saying that –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I am loath to interrupt the member on her feet, but she cannot stand in this place and tell lies.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the House, that is unparliamentary language. State your point of order.

Mary-Anne Thomas: My point of order is relevance to the government business program. It is not an opportunity to attack the budget.

The SPEAKER: The member for Evelyn will come back to the government business program.

Bridget VALLENCE: This budget relies on the big new emergency services tax that is in the budget, and that is what today is all about. It is a budget day that has a budget that the government says has no new taxes but absolutely relies on the new emergency services tax, which is taxing farmers, renters, manufacturing businesses and families to the hilt. Who would say that this budget has no new taxes when it has a 150 per cent increase on farmers in a cost-of-living crisis? Well, the Liberals and Nationals will scrap this tax, and we ask the Labor government to have some decency and to actually come clean about their budget only relying on this new tax, its 60th tax for the 10 years of this Labor government.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I am loath to do this to the Manager of Opposition Business, but she has been on her feet for more than a minute and she has still not touched on the government business program.

The SPEAKER: Yes, I do remind the member for Evelyn about the government business program before the house.

Bridget VALLENCE: It is a very short government business program today, given the circumstances of the budget being handed down, when, again, I noticed that the members on the other side were very, very flat, because they know actually what is in the papers. It is what is not in the papers that is probably more important.

I can confirm the Leader of the House's estimation that the opposition will be opposing the government business program, and that is because of our very reasonable request to go into consideration in detail on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, a bill that our very hardworking shadow minister the member for Ovens Valley sought to go into consideration in detail on, because despite the budget speech just having come forward and the Treasurer trying to tell Victorians that this budget has no new taxes, this Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill has not one but two new taxes in it.

We know the truth. Victorians are starting to see the truth of this government, that it is a high-taxing government – the highest taxes in the country under this Allan Labor government here in Victoria. The member for Ovens Valley – who has been a very busy shadow minister recently with the number

of bills that he has had to address in the chamber – will be coming and giving the opposition's view about the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill. We did seek to scrutinise this bill more, but of course week after week after week in this people's chamber this Allan Labor government, who does not govern for all, has denied the very reasonable request for us to scrutinise this bill further to make sure that it works for all Victorians and to highlight and ask questions about why this bill is taxing Victorians more. This government's members will get up during the debate, I am sure, and try to say that it does not include a tax, but it does. So really you only have to read the detail in this bill and see that it does. Again, it is just a desperate attempt from this Allan Labor government to scrape in more revenue. It is going to hurt our clubs, Community Clubs Victoria members and our clubs' fantastic employers, who train young people. We will be opposing the government business program.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (13:46): Let the record show that every time those in this house seek to bring legislation enacting gambling reform to reduce gambling harm in our state, every single time those opposite oppose us even debating it in the house. We have been enacting a series of reforms to reduce the harm of gambling, and that is another step that we are seeking to take today with the introduction of the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. And of course again they seek to block, because those opposite are blockers. However, we will keep trying and we will keep pushing, because we know that we must reform gambling to support those in Victoria who experience harm. We heard from the Leader of the House regarding the health harms. We know that up to a million Victorians every year experience gambling harm.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I think this is pre-empting debate on the bill. It is a narrow procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: I think that ship sailed some time ago, but I do ask the member for Yan Yean to be mindful that we are not here to debate, we are here to talk about the government business program.

Lauren KATHAGE: The reason this government business program is so important is because Victorians experience harm. The member for Evelyn referenced earlier the speech by our Treasurer Jaclyn Symes, talking about the support that we are giving to mortgage-stressed Victorians, because people are losing their homes in a cost-of-living crisis. People who are experiencing stress can turn to gambling and experience greater rates of gambling, so I am proud to be part of a government that does not oppose it every single time we bring it but seeks to continue to improve the lives of Victorians through things such as gambling harm reduction.

It is a very serious matter – it is; I know that – but this legislation, with its talk of precommitment and self-exclusion, reminded me of those opposite actually, the Liberals and the Nationals. Perhaps they do not want to talk about precommitment, because their commitment to each other has fallen apart. The Liberals and the Nationals have split, and the commitment does not mean anything anymore. As with the self-exclusion that we are introducing in this legislation, it seems that the Nationals have self-excluded themselves from their relationship with the coalition, and that is their right for self-exclusion. So I can understand why they would be a bit touchy to discuss things which touch so closely on their failed relationship.

But the gambling harm reduction must carry on. We have heard in our inquiry about the harms that are caused for women particularly. We know that for women who are incarcerated it is often related to gambling and the harms associated with gambling.

We know that for women who present to emergency departments who have husbands who gamble at harmful levels, the majority of those women who are there for domestic violence are there following their partner's gambling loss. When their partner loses, it is the woman that pays. We know that the harm from gambling goes well beyond bank balances. It affects relationships, it affects children, it affects all walks of life. I am really proud that our government is bringing this legislation to the house today.

The member for Evelyn and the member for Brighton attempted to block the last set of reforms to gambling legislation we introduced in this place. They stood up and opposed us even talking about the reforms in here. They did not even want to talk about them, so let that be known. The previous reform that I have spoken about, some of the things I am proudest of include the mandatory closure periods, making sure that venues cannot shuffle gamblers from one venue to another to continue to bleed them dry. I also think it is really important that we are continuing the carded play reforms, and we are seeing more of that this week, because we know that when people have the chance to stop and reflect and think about their gambling and the choices that they are making, they will have the opportunity to make better choices for themselves and their families. That is why I am proud to debate this bill in the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (13:51): I echo the sentiments of the member for Evelyn in opposing today's government business program, based on once again the inability to scrutinise the government in consideration in detail. Can we just correct a few things? I am not quite sure what the member for Yan Yean's comments about the federal Parliament have to do with here, but you could see by our unity this morning on the steps of Parliament, whilst the other side were introducing their 60th new or increased tax, that the Liberals and the Nationals have committed to scrap that tax, because this is the straw that has broken the camel's back. If this is a tax and a fund or a levy that the other side is so proud of, why were they not out on the steps with us this morning speaking to our volunteers? Why were they not there?

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance to the government business program.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think it has been a fairly wideranging debate on both sides. I would like members to talk about the government business program though; that would be good.

Jade BENHAM: As I said, it has been a fairly wideranging debate, given the fact that the member for Yan Yean brought up the federal Parliament and what is going on in there.

I would like to point out that when we are talking about new taxes that are being introduced on budget day, I would say that is entirely relevant to the government business program today, not to mention the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The Treasurer said yesterday that there will be no new taxes introduced. This immediately introduces two new taxes to 'extract better value from Victorians'. To extract better value from Victorians in a cost-of-living crisis. That is absolutely preposterous. We did speak up again, and do you know why? The Nationals approach these bills, these changes to legislation and the increases in taxes and levies to gaming venues because in regions – in the actual regions – those venues are owned a lot of the time by families. They are family businesses that can ill afford any more taxes and levies on things that are part of their core business. During a cost-of-living crisis – and you might know this if you ever got out into the community and had a meal at a pub or a pot – when you are buying a shout for three and it costs you around \$50 because of excises and things like that –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Wendouree, 10 minutes outside, please.

Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.

Jade BENHAM: We need to actually make it viable for businesses to operate in this state, and that includes family-owned entertainment venues, particularly when in my region you can go over the river to a different community-owned club and the rules are completely different. So yes, we do like to scrutinise these gambling bills when they come to the house. We would like the opportunity to consider them in detail. We think it is vital for those business operators in our regions to be able to do so, so that the government is not extracting more taxes from Victorians. What an absolutely ridiculous thing to say.

While we are on the new taxes and things, just a brush through the budget papers has revealed, while they are taking \$139 million out of local communities through their new emergency services tax, they have also cut regional development by another 17 per cent. So not only are they extracting ‘value’ from regional Victorian communities through their new emergency services tax, they are also reducing the regional development fund by another 17 per cent. Please, spare me when you say that you govern for all Victorians. It is an absolutely ridiculous thing to say – extracting more money each and every day out of regional communities. Clearly by the amount of people that were on the front steps of Parliament today, they have had enough. Enough is enough.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (13:56): As the Leader of the House and the member for Yan Yean have both noted, today is budget day. We have just had a historic occasion where the first ever female Treasurer in the state of Victoria, Ms Jaclyn Symes, came from the other place, entered our chamber here, the hallowed green hall, and delivered her first budget. It was a budget with hope, and it was a budget with heart. It was actually quite good to hear it being delivered here, looking at the different ways that our government will be seeking to support Victorians further when they need it most. There are so many different things here. I will not anticipate the debate on it, but it was wonderful to hear the Treasurer deliver her speech.

The government business program for the day ahead: obviously we have had the budget delivered, and we do have the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. We have a very full list of willing and enthusiastic speakers on this bill today. There are many who are here to extol the virtues of it, because it will reduce gambling harm and it seeks to reduce money laundering. Gambling comes with many negatives, and that has to be acknowledged in this chamber. It is disappointing that our government business program is also being rejected by the opposition today, that they are not supporting it. It is a shame. Up until now we have only had a handful of times – literally five times – in the 60th Victorian Parliament when the opposition has supported our government business program. I was hoping we could at least get to the second hand and get to six, but it has not happened. It is disappointing but not surprising.

There is a lot that this bill will do. It is really important we always continue to improve the situation for Victorians across the state, and gambling does create harm, it really does. The member for Yan Yean was talking about some of the harms that come as a result when people lose money. I have seen it myself. I saw it as a child whose father was a bit of a punter. We never got into terrible trouble in our family – we were lucky – but we knew people who did. You could see the effects of it, and it was ugly and it was hurtful. So this legislation seeks to drive down some of those harms. It is important legislation.

There is something I do want to touch on, though, given that this has been probably the widest ranging government business program debate I have been a participant in. I know that those opposite were talking about the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, which is a levy, just as the fire services levy, which was introduced by the former coalition government, was a levy. This is a levy as well. I do not know how it changes the nomenclature when we bring it in and all of a sudden they change the title of it from ‘levy’ to ‘tax’. It is an interesting characterisation on their part.

So when they bring it in it is a levy, and when we then amend it and adjust it to reflect the need out there, given climate change and the continuous disasters which keep hitting our state disproportionately to every other part of the country, they change the characterisation of it.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order on relevance to this very narrow procedural debate, Deputy Speaker, the Labor government has changed it because they are not reserving it for volunteers anymore. They are not reserving this for volunteers anymore.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business knows that points of order are not an opportunity for debate. This has been a wide-ranging debate, and we all know it, and I would love you to come back to the government business program, member for Monbulk.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, for your ruling on that, and I did note that the Speaker herself mentioned before that the ship had sailed on that one, so I thought I would wave the ship off from the shore. Once again, I am looking forward to today's proceedings on the government business program. I am looking forward to hearing the contributions on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The minister and the previous minister and their teams have done quite a lot of work in this regard, and I commend them for it. We are always about the business of governing for Victoria, and once again, with today being budget day, so much will come in the year ahead from the work that has been done here. I commend the Treasurer on her work and her team's work in this; I commend our government on the program ahead for the day, and I look forward to it unfolding today.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:01): I am pleased to rise today to contribute to the government business program and the reasons why we oppose it. Again, the reason stated why we oppose it is because we want to go into consideration in detail on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It has been pointed out to us that we cannot do it because the minister for this bill is in the other house, and this is what this government does: all the ministers that should be in consideration in detail – the Treasurer, the Minister for Housing and Building, this minister as well – are all hiding in the upper house, so we cannot do consideration in detail, and that is pretty gutless of the government. When you do your next reshuffle, get the ministers that matter into the lower house so we can do consideration in detail; rather than hiding them away in the doll's house over the other side, bring them into this house so they can be scrutinised. That is not too much to ask.

It has been a wide-ranging debate today; we have talked about the budget, and oh my goodness, do I feel as though every time this government says, 'We're doing everything for Victoria,' the community of Narracan gets screwed over, literally. Sorry, I will use another word – but I cannot use that either, Deputy Speaker, because you will pick me up for that.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: But again, the West Gippsland Hospital, no uplift in the budget – no uplift in the budget for the West Gippsland Hospital.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: It was meant to start in 2024, member for Point Cook –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Point Cook can leave the chamber for 10 minutes.

Member for Point Cook withdrew from chamber.

Wayne FARNHAM: but this government has broken its promise on that. What is even more disappointing about that was I asked the Minister of the Health back on 12 November last year, just after my father died, 'Give my community a date on when this hospital will start', and the Minister for Health has not answered that question six months later, and the community of West Gippsland deserve to know when that is going to start. Looking at the budget today, at best it is going to be in the back half of 2026, two years after the government committed to it – two years later, and that is disgraceful. I do not care what anyone says, the minister can argue with me all she wants, but she knows the commitment of the hospital and she knows it has been wound back and delayed. So I want to see an excavator on that site more than anyone else.

But we have had a couple of wide-ranging debates today; it has gone wide. We have talked about the fire services levy and the thousands of volunteers who are out the front today protesting against this rise. The member for Monbulk rightly stated we brought in the levy; we did not call it a volunteer levy, we called it a levy, but we did not charge farmers \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000 a year. That is what we did not do, and that is what this government has done. When farmers are already under stress – they

are already buying in feed, they are buying in water – and the government slugs this tax on them, of course they are going to be on the steps of Parliament protesting, and so they should be.

You cannot bring in a tax and put it under a volunteers banner. It is not right. It would have been good to see the member for Werribee out there today supporting his CFA volunteers. It would have been good for him to be out there, but no, he was hiding out here. I would love to have seen the member for Werribee out there today after last week's contribution, standing up for his volunteers, but no, he did not. He hid behind the walls.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker: relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It has been a wideranging debate. The member to continue, preferably on the government business program.

Wayne FARNHAM: I will try to speak on it, but it is pretty thin. We have only got one bill to speak about, and it has gone wide, as you rightly pointed out.

We have talked about the 60th tax, but okay, I will talk about the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill. Just the other day the Treasurer said, 'No more new taxes; there'll be no more taxes.' The first bill that comes into this place – more taxes. The very first bill, not 24 hours after the Treasurer said it – another bill, another tax. It is as simple as that. Unfortunately, at this point in time I cannot pre-empt debate, but from the rough read I have had of the bill coming in today, it brings another two new taxes into this state. So straight off, within the first 24 hours – well done, government – more taxes to Victorians: of course we oppose the program.

Assembly divided on motion:

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

Noes (28): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Rulings from the Chair

Broadcast of proceedings

The SPEAKER (14:12): Before we move to members statements I take this opportunity to remind members of my ruling of March last year about standing order 234 and the rebroadcast of chamber proceedings. Members will know that standing order 233 provides for an official broadcast of chamber proceedings and standing order 234 provides for that official broadcast to be rebroadcast subject to certain requirements. Rebroadcasting various clips from the chamber on social media or online is a useful way for members to inform constituents of their work in the chamber. Standing order 234 prohibits digital manipulation of rebroadcast footage. I remind members that they must not edit or manipulate a rebroadcast clip in a way that changes the meaning or context of the clip. I ask members

to take care when preparing broadcast clips for rebroadcast or asking staff to do it for them to ensure those clips comply with the terms of standing order 234.

Members statements

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): Today I stood on the steps of Parliament with so many CFA volunteers, with farmers and with mums and dads who are concerned about the great big tax that the Victorian Labor Party are imposing on every single Victorian. They came in here today because they know that this government has mistreated him and disrespected them for far too long. They are hanging up their uniforms, they are parking the trucks and they are finally calling out this Labor government for what they have done.

They continue to expect them to turn out as volunteers to protect our state. They want them to get out of bed at midnight to go to the car accidents on the freeways. They expect them when the bushfires are in state forests to get out of bed, to bring along everybody from their community, for weeks on end to protect our state. And what do they get? They get a great big new tax.

Only a Victorian Liberal–Nationals government would repeal this tax and ensure each and every Victorian gets their fair share. We cannot continue with a government who disrespects volunteers. We cannot continue with a government that puts taxes on every single business in this state and expects them to come out and support our community. It is simply too much. This is a \$2.1 billion tax grab by this government on the very farmers who are suffering under drought at the moment, with drought conditions. The mental health impact on our state is going to be horrendous through those farmers. You must repeal this tax.

National Volunteer Week

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:15): In volunteer week we say thank you to all those who contribute so much to our communities. Whether it is making sure kids can participate in sport, getting up in the middle of the night to help with fires or storms or rescue animals, collecting signatures to keep post offices open, working in op shops, providing respite or loving foster homes, helping in schools, planting trees or sitting with those who are sick and dying, the ways volunteers selflessly contribute to our community are endless and so very important. I am proud of today's budget – Labor truly doing what matters. But a highlight for me is the doubling of funding for food relief. Recent grants have boosted funding to local programs at Glenroy Neighbourhood House, Dallas Neighbourhood House, Banksia Gardens, Nourishing Neighbours and the Halal Food Bank.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I cannot express enough gratitude for the many volunteers who make sure people have the dignity of a meal on the table and the ability to feed their children. A shout-out to coordinators Bec, Leanne, Rana, Basir and Shafi. I occasionally join my husband Joe and our girls volunteering at the St Mark's Hope Cafe in Fawkner, which provides a three-course meal every Thursday night for those doing it tough. A huge thanks to the women that come together to cook, including Irene and Marie; all the volunteers, including Christine, Luke, Sandra, the two Marias, Phil, Mary, Dylan, Anna, Virginia, Marie, Lauren, Anagi, Phil, Fraser, Gina, Stella, Michael, Ali, Hassan, Rob, Celeste, Marianne, John, Chantelle, Kelly, Chalise, Jacinta, Vivienne, Margaret, Marilyn and Rosemary; and of course Father Colin for his support.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:16): Thousands of people have descended on the steps of Parliament in protest at the Labor government's heartless, insidious cash grab disguised as an emergency services levy. Further east, in my electorate, and also around regional Victoria, locals who could not make it to Melbourne were protesting out the front of a Labor minister's office. They are protesting because farmers will pay a whopping 150 per cent more than under the previous levy. The

tax for all households and commercial properties will double. The tax for industrial land will go up 64 per cent.

Juliana Addison interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Wendouree, 10 minutes.

Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.

Martin CAMERON: Every single person in Victoria will be affected by this tax. And do not be fooled by the name. The money will not go back into the CFA's regional communities, it will go straight into government coffers to fund core services, because this government is up to its eyeballs in debt.

This tax has been loudly and clearly rejected by the United Firefighters Union, FRV, the CFA, farmers, local councils and everyday Victorians – and yet Labor still forged ahead. That is why today the Nationals and Liberals have pledged to scrap the tax. Under our plan, the Liberals and Nationals will repeal the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund legislation and return to a simpler, fairer fire services property levy, a model that funds fire services transparently without punishing home owners, renters or farmers.

Mordialloc electorate centenaries

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (14:18): It was great to join Edithvale fire brigade for their 100-year anniversary dinner and celebration recently – a volunteer brigade that has served our community for generations and a volunteer brigade that is surrounded by FRV legends who support them, because we all work as one in emergency services. And to hear the contribution they have made, the volunteers turn out to hundreds of callouts each and every year and support our community; they are so well supported. They have got 139 members now. I want to give a big shout-out to outgoing captain Sean McGuckin; the leadership of Graham Fountain, the immediate past CFA captain as well, affectionately known as Spout; and everyone that connected together on this. The Country Fire Authority celebrated its 80 years this year, but Edithvale CFA was going for 20 years before that, showing the significance of their contribution.

And it is on the back of last week celebrating Aspendale Primary School's 100-year celebration – those times when the grass was mowed by animals on the actual field and there were only a few dozen students, all the way through to the 525 students and the thriving community that we have there now. Generations have loved and appreciated the first-class education that we have had at Aspendale Primary School. So to celebrate their 100 years with hundreds in our local community and to see the legends of Edithvale CFA just shows the history and the contribution from so many and a really exciting and thriving time in the Mordialloc constituency.

Budget 2025–26

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:19): This budget, called 'Focused on what matters most', clearly is a budget fail, because Victorians do not matter and those farmers, Victorians and volunteers on the steps today do not matter according to the Allan Labor government. What a fail today has been.

A sellout crowd of protesters on budget day – it was the big grand final day for the government, and what was it? A fail – all those people out the front. The government did not have the guts to go out there and face the farmers, face the volunteers and listen to their stories. What a disgrace. Where was the Premier today? Hiding in Federation Square, not out there facing the farmers that are losing their farms because of this hopeless government.

This government has failed Victorians at a time that matters the most. These volunteers are expected to pay a tax to go out and put out fires on government land. What a disgrace this is. This is because the government is broke. They have run out of money, and now they are expecting volunteers and farmers to pick up the tab. What a failure this is. Only a Liberal–National government will repeal the

tax, axe the tax, and ensure that Victorians do not have to suffer from Labor's waste and mismanagement. It is a complete fail, and this is just an absolutely hopeless budget which we have seen. No-one matters according to this government.

Memory Walk and Jog

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (14:21): There are not many things that get my kids out of bed at 7:30 on a Sunday morning, but on Sunday we walked for Dementia Australia in the Memory Walk and Jog. We were part of Team Beno, my 50-year-old beautiful friend who was diagnosed with early onset dementia five years ago. It is believed that 29,000 young people are living with early onset dementia in Australia, with 7400 of these people being Victorians. Dementia is the second-leading cause of death in Australia and the leading cause of death to women. Team Beno braved the cold, and we had over 60 family and friends do the walk, with Beno's son Connor being Victoria's number one individual fundraiser, raising an incredible \$14,140.

Over the past five years I have seen my friend go from a high-power executive to being like a child again. I have had to get to know a new person. I have watched her deteriorate into a person that we hardly recognise anymore. This disease is absolutely crippling. It breaks your soul, and it is very, very hard to watch. Thank you to Dementia Australia for all the amazing work you do with all the families and loved ones. To Macca, Sienna, Connor and all your family and friends: thank you for your incredible strength for your mum. Life is short. Love your tribe, and love them hard.

AMJ Strata Group

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:22): Apartment residents in Brunswick have contacted me about excessive special levies from their strata manager, AMJ Strata Group. Special levies are typically for extraordinary expenses, but AMJ Strata seems to be using them to rob residents, applying arbitrary charges for trivial matters.

Apartment owner Rabea is facing a \$795 special levy for opening an unmarked, unlocked door in his building. Each time he has been sent a reminder email, AMJ Strata has charged him for it – first \$40, then \$80. He recently paid his annual owners corp fees, but AMJ Strata instead took \$889.50 out of that payment. Another former tenant recently moved out of his apartment and asked AMJ Strata for protective covers for the lift for moving furniture. AMJ Strata told him that this would cost \$300 despite it not being stated in the owners corp rules. So instead of protective covers he took before and after photos of the lift to confirm that there was no damage. But AMJ Strata charged the owner a \$1035 levy, helping themselves to \$555 for reviewing CCTV and \$480 for preparation of the levy notice. Without paying this, the tenant cannot have his bond refunded.

AMJ Strata have not responded to my emails, but I ask that they stop issuing my constituents unreasonable and arbitrary fees, and I call on the government to outlaw this behaviour in its upcoming review of the Owners Corporations Act 2006.

Public transport

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (14:24): I have to say this budget is certainly listening to the voices of students and the parents behind them. About a year ago I worked in with Albert Park College. There were some students there that wanted to do a project whereby they would come up with a topic and then I would help them in terms of their advocacy to Parliament, but it was all their work. Guess what they came up with? They came up with making public transport free for students – oh my goodness – and it has come true. I want to thank them for their important advocacy. Do you know why they wanted to do it? Because they thought it was fair – it did not matter what your background was; everyone got the same opportunity in terms of access to public transport – but also because it would encourage more people to use public transport. So this is a salute to them, but also, can I say, to the government returning the favour and actually making public transport free for every Victorian under 18 from 1 January 2026. This will on average save families up to \$755 a year. If you have got multiple children,

you can imagine the maths on that as well. So this is really a salute to them and a salute to this budget delivery.

South Melbourne Life Saving Club

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (14:25): Secondly, I also want to say I did attend the South Melbourne Life Saving Club presentation night, their annual presentation night, at the South Melbourne Life Saving Club – fancy that. It was a wonderful night. Credit to Alison Porter, who is the president. They really have a family ambience. They perform great in competitions, and it is really social as well – great for our community.

Budget 2025–26

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (14:25): Ladies and gentlemen, another state budget has been handed down, and here we are, a decade deep into Labor's financial mismanagement, spiralling debt and absolute deceit. This mob cannot manage money and insult Victorians with their smoke-and-mirrors spin, with misleading forecasts, manipulated figures and broken promises.

Just last week, in the dead of night, Labor ran through their 60th new or increased tax at 2 am in the morning, the emergency services levy, which thousands of Victorians are here on the front steps of Parliament protesting, and just this week Labor are introducing yet another two taxes. Labor is addicted to taxes. They keep coming back for one more hit, one more new tax: 'I swear it's the last time' – but it is never the last time. Labor wastes your money, and you are paying for it.

So next time you are wondering why your grocery costs are going up and up, why it costs more for your morning coffee or why they cannot seem to fix that road across the corner from your house, this is why. We are paying \$25 million in interest alone every single day, because Labor has bankrupted Victoria. A coalition government will do things differently. We will scrap the emergency services levy, commit to no new taxes and have a live spending tracker to have accountability for your money. Time is ticking on this corrupt, broke-as government. Join us as we rid the rot next November.

Smile Squad

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:27): Our Victorian Labor government's free dental in schools program, Smile Squad, initiative is continuing to save families across my communities of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West significant dollars every single year. Across Merri-bek there have been over 7000 overall chair visits and consultations. We have provided over 2800 individual service visits in all settings, including mobile and fixed settings, including oral health checks, teeth cleaning, X-rays, fluoride and varnish application, sealants, fillings, restorations, dietary advice and free follow-up treatments. Smile Squad is saving families around \$400 per visit.

A big thankyou to the entire Smile Squad team for delivering the program locally, including Melanie van Altena, the director of the school dental program; Emily Blazeovski, the Dental Health Services Victoria lead officer; Jonathan Teoh, the manager of dental services at Merri Health, now Holstep Health; Mark Colagrande, the Coburg West principal, who we visited on the day recently; and Coburg West school captains from my old primary school Maggie Hegarty and William Batsakis.

Pascoe Vale South Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:28): On 26 March I had the absolute pleasure of welcoming Premier Allan and the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Ben Carroll to visit Pascoe Vale South Primary School in my community to highlight the ongoing rollout of the \$400 school saving bonus across the state, including saving Pascoe Vale South families almost \$120,000 on school uniforms, textbooks and excursions. The visit was also a great chance to talk about the school's ongoing priorities.

Australian International Academy

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:28): On 22 April it was also great to help welcome the Premier to visit the Australian international Islamic academy in Coburg.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:28): I want to thank the incredible emergency services volunteers, including the thousands who rallied on the steps of Parliament and those standing strong in their local communities.

A Liberals and Nationals government will scrap the emergency services tax when elected to government next year. This cruel tax rips \$765 million a year from families, farmers and small businesses under a false promise of supporting emergency services. But it is not about support, it is about plugging Labor's budget black hole. Regional communities are already battling drought and soaring costs. Farmers hit with a 150 per cent increase deserve better. It is not just our farmers; millions and millions and millions of dollars will come from our communities when rates are collected – millions ripped from every single family, every business and every resident in our region. They will be impacted by this tax, and this is something our regional communities cannot afford.

We will scrap the tax, and we will restore the fire services property levy. Funding for the SES and vital services will be delivered transparently through the state budget and not buried in your rates notices. The Allan Labor government cannot manage money and they cannot manage our emergency services, and every Victorian is paying the price. To our volunteers: your voices are heard. Under our leadership, the Liberals and Nationals, real change is coming.

National Volunteer Week

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (14:30): I am delighted to rise in National Volunteer Week. It is a time to recognise the quiet heroes who knit the fabric of our communities together. Across my electorate, volunteers give their time, their energy and their hearts, and nowhere is this more evident than in our neighbourhood houses. Darley, Ballarat East and Meredith neighbourhood houses are shining examples of what community looks like. Whether it is running playgroups, delivering food relief, offering training and workshops or just providing a warm and welcoming space, these houses do so much for so many. They are not just buildings; they are the beating hearts of our towns.

I am going to be out this week visiting these wonderful places, along with the Brown Hill Progress Association, with some thankyou cupcakes – a small token of appreciation for the incredible work they do bringing people together and strengthening local pride. Volunteers do not do it for recognition, but they deserve every bit of it. To every person who helps out at a neighbourhood house, a local hall, a community garden or a food bank, we say thankyou. Your work builds stronger, kinder communities and it does not go unnoticed. Happy National Volunteer Week to them all.

Budget 2025–26

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (14:31): A quick shout-out to our wonderful Treasurer for delivering a great budget. I know that Bacchus Marsh College are incredibly excited to hear their news, as is Caledonian Primary School.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (14:31): What an impassioned and dedicated assembly of people from regional Victoria did we see on the steps of this Parliament today. They came here in their thousands, they came here proudly wearing their uniforms, they came here proudly as friends and representatives and leaders of their communities. These people volunteer on top of all of the dedicated work they do to put food on our tables, to make sure we have the products we need to enjoy the quality of life we do in this great state and this great country. And what did this government do? It ignored them. It snubbed them. They were here. They were upset. They were concerned. They are worried

about the future of their families and their local communities because the government led by this Premier keeps heaping upon them tax after tax. Imagine saying to regional Victorians, the farmers who I said put food on the table, that we are going to push you off your farm.

I spoke to them today and last week when they came here. They see it that seriously. They are asking how can they go on when they have a government that keeps imposing taxes on them. Today's budget shows unemployment going up, employment going down, the fiscal cash deficit going up and the operating surplus is illusory. Debt, whether it is gross state debt or general government debt, is on the way up.

Geoff Champion

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:33): I rise to pay tribute to Geoff Champion, a life member of the Labor Party and a member of the Monbulk branch, who passed away last month. Born on 10 May 1942, Geoff came from a strong Labor background and was a true believer who worked tirelessly for the party for over 50 years. He joined the Belgrave Heights–Selby branch in the mid 1970s, then the Dandenong Ranges branch, the Upwey foothills and eventually the Monbulk branch as the electoral boundaries changed. Geoff was an engineer by profession and used his many skills to good use for the benefit of others over the years. He built campaign trailers and towed them around, A-frames and anything else that was required. He always gave his time to do whatever was needed, including sitting on branch executives, campaign committees and taking on the role of campaign manager. Most importantly, though, Geoff was a loving husband to Roslyn and a much-loved father and grandfather. He will be missed by so many, and I send my heartfelt condolences to all who knew and loved him. Vale, Geoff Champion.

Kalorama Chestnut Festival

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:34): Congratulations to the organisers of the Kalorama Chestnut Festival for another hugely successful event. It was great to see so many enjoying the festivities in the beautiful autumnal sunshine, raising funds for the fabulous Mount Dandenong Primary School.

Men's sheds

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:34): I am also looking forward to attending the official opening of Oaktree Den at Mountain District Learning Centre in Ferntree Gully later this month. They were grant recipients in the 2023–24 men's shed funding program, with a grant of over \$37,000 being awarded. Men's sheds provide amazing spaces where men can come together, make new friends and feel connected.

National Volunteer Week

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:34): This week is National Volunteer Week. I would like to give a shout-out to all across the foothills and hills.

Marcus Road Kindergarten

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (14:34): The Allan Labor government is giving more children the best start in life with a brand new kindergarten opening in Dingley Village. Thank you to the Minister for Children for joining me to officially open Marcus Road Kindergarten, together with the help of some of my youngest constituents, where we have up to 118 kindergarten places now available.

Keysborough Learning Centre

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (14:35): On another note, I also thank the Minister for Skills and TAFE for visiting to unveil the Keysborough Learning Centre's redesigned community education and work readiness program. More than 90 students have completed or nearly completed their qualifications through the program, and almost 80 per cent have already gone on to secure jobs. Thank

you to Neil Cooper and the whole team at KLC for opening doors to people in our community from all sorts of backgrounds, helping them to build their skills, confidence and career.

Anzac Day

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (14:35): Finally, I was honoured to join Anzac services in our community last month: the dawn service in Clayton, the ceremony organised by Vietnamese veterans, the Dingley Village Men's Shed Anzac service, the Cheltenham Moorabbin RSL sub-branch service and Kingswood Primary School's Anzac Day children's service. Thank you for coming together to honour all Australians who have served in wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations. Lest we forget.

Kororoit public transport

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:36): As we know, public transport has always been one of my greatest passions since becoming the member for Kororoit. It has been the number one issue raised with me by residents across the entire electorate, from Deer Park to Caroline Springs, from Aintree to Mount Atkinson. Our communities need better, more connected public transport to get to work, to get to school, to get to appointments and to stay linked with family and friends. Nowhere has that been made clearer than in Mount Atkinson. I have literally spent countless hours listening to and working with residents – hardworking families who have been waiting too long simply for the basics. Well, I have heard you, the Allan Labor government has heard you and today's budget has delivered for you. I am proud to say that Mount Atkinson will no longer be the island of the west. The introduction of the brand new route 140, connecting Rockbank station to Tarneit station via Mount Atkinson, will finally give this growing community the vital link that it deserves. We are also delivering route 405, connecting Cairnlea with Deer Park station, and reconfiguring routes 444, 461, 463 and 464 to fill coverage gaps in Aintree, Hillside, Deanside and Fraser Rise, linking more residents to jobs, schools and the Metro Tunnel service.

From 1 January we are introducing free public transport for children under 18, saving families up to \$755 a year – real help with the cost of living right there. To the people of Mount Atkinson and to the people all across Kororoit: thank you for your advocacy. You have shared your stories, I have taken them to Parliament and together we have delivered.

Werribee electorate ministerial visits

John LISTER (Werribee) (14:37): I have been clear to my community that I would work in government to fight for our community, and during the break I welcomed many ministers to Werribee to talk about what matters to our community. This is one of the advantages I have as a Labor member for our seat. Community safety is a priority for me, and our reforms and investments in police locally are helping to address youth crime. The Minister for Police joined my Wyndham MP colleagues and me at the Werribee police complex to speak to the youth crime taskforce and proactive policing unit. While there are still challenges that we will support police to address, we are seeing amazing results from these teams, working with community leaders to prevent crime and reduce re-offending. On behalf of the Wyndham community we thank them for their hard work.

We have been clear that we also need more local roads to reduce local congestion, which is why the member for Tarneit and I have been successful in our advocacy for a new bridge between Wyndham Vale and Tarneit. We welcomed the Minister for Transport Infrastructure for a tour of our Wyndham ring-road sites and look forward to working with the federal Labor government and local councils to deliver this project. This is going to be a game changer, reducing reliance on Heaths Road and Ballan Road in my community.

Finally, we know people are doing it tough, which is why financial counselling is so important. Thank you to the Minister for Consumer Affairs for coming to Werribee to meet with one of the agencies that has been funded for financial counselling for Victorian communities. Thank you to my Labor colleagues for their hard work.

Budget 2025–26

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:39): I wish to congratulate the Treasurer on handing down her first budget. It is a significant day for Victoria, as Jaclyn Symes is the first woman in our state's history to be Treasurer and to hand down a budget. I congratulate the Treasurer on a budget that is focused on what matters most. We know what matters most to Victorians, and that is real help with the cost of living, so we are investing even more in frontline services, including hospitals and schools, fixing our roads and potholes, community safety and teaching skills for the future as well as backing small business. In this budget we are providing energy bill relief to households with a concession card, increasing the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and providing more support for food relief.

We are making public transport free for under-18s and providing more than 65,000 extra Get Active Kids \$200 vouchers. We are also making record investments in health care, public transport and road maintenance. I am delighted that we are funding a Ballarat bus network review, which people across my community have been calling for. This budget is also a winner for the local Scouts, with \$300,000 to upgrade the Ballarat Scouts water activity centre on Lake Wendouree. There will also be funding for the installation of digital CCTV at Wendouree station, as well as the support of a new Country Fire Authority satellite station at Wendouree.

Transport infrastructure

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:40): Futuristic, amazing and unbelievable – that is how some of the students from Killara Primary School yesterday described the brand new Parkville station. I was absolutely delighted to join the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Treasurer and the fantastic member for Cranbourne alongside Rangebank Primary students from her electorate to see this incredible brand new station, one of five as part of the Metro Tunnel project. To be able to see the excitement on the faces of students as they had the opportunity to have a look at this world-class piece of public transport infrastructure was an absolute highlight, and that from 1 January next year, thanks to this Allan Labor government, those students will be able to travel on this system for free is something that is incredibly important and a wonderful initiative that has been announced within the budget.

As you know, providing world-class public transport, with the investment in infrastructure, the investment in rolling stock and staff and of course the announcement on both Saturday and Sunday that seniors will travel free on weekends and our young people under 18 will travel free all the way through, is only possible thanks to an Allan Labor government.

Vermont Primary School

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:42): Since its establishment as Delaney's Road Common School in 1869, Vermont Primary School has proudly served our community with distinction, consistently delivering outstanding outcomes for students. As a proud public school, Vermont Primary School was one of the top-ranked schools in the 2024 NAPLAN results, placing it amongst the top-performing schools not only here in Victoria but across Australia. This stellar reputation continues to attract families to the Vermont area eager to enrol their children in such an exceptional institution.

With a long and proud history, some of Vermont Primary School's buildings are now ageing. Over the past three years I have worked closely with the passionate Vermont Primary School community. We garnered the support of more than 800 locals calling for a master plan to upgrade the school's facilities, and I am so thrilled that we have secured funding for the master plan in this year's budget.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to principal Jess Mann, vice-principal Joy Cook and all of the school council, led by president Lisa Portell, for their tireless advocacy and commitment to the school's future.

Vermont Eagles

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:43): On another matter, I was delighted to attend the Vermont Eagles ladies round last Friday, when we celebrated four-time premiership captain Bella

Touhy's hundredth game, a remarkable milestone. The evening brought together all of the Vermont Eagles netball teams at a single venue, creating a fantastic atmosphere to celebrate the club's spirit and achievements. A special thankyou to netball coordinator Narelle Coghlan for her quiet yet invaluable contribution to the club. Congratulations again to Bella on the outstanding achievement.

Committees

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Reference

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:43): I move:

That this house refers an inquiry into how students can be better supported with advice and pathways for jobs in in-demand industries, including through TAFE and other vocational routes, to the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 September 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:44): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and it is another bill where the Allan Labor government continues to find ways tax Victorians. Having just had – I do not know – however many thousand people on the front steps today concerned about the tax that they pushed through last week, the Treasurer then came along and said there will be no taxes in the budget this year. That was only about 2 hours ago; less than 2 hours ago the Treasurer came into this place and said there were no new taxes in the budget, and the first bill that is up this afternoon has not one but two new taxes. Of all days to pick they pick budget day to put two new taxes on the agenda. I remember Premier Andrews early on – in fact the evening before he was first elected as Premier – when he said, 'I give you my word there'll be no new taxes,' and now we are up to about 62 new taxes. Now the Treasurer has given her word that there will be no new taxes, and we end up with two today. Maybe the Treasurer needs to speak with the Leader of the House or the Premier and make sure their messaging is right.

This bill will introduce two taxes on businesses, clubs, pubs, pokie venues and lottery outlets. They will all be slugged again. As I said, Victorians are already concerned about the emergency services tax that I spoke about before. For many houses in Victoria that tax will be doubled, and farmers will see a doubling and tripling of their fire services levy, which is disguised as the emergency services tax. It really is a kick in the guts to CFA volunteers, who were out there on the steps today looking for the Premier, but the Premier did not front. They can no longer stand the pain. Country people are extremely resilient, and they can stand a lot – they have in the past and they will in the future. But when they come together in droves, in their hundreds and thousands, like they did today, it really is sending a message, and the government needs to start to listen, because there are going to be some poor outcomes out of this tax. It is going to be detrimental for some families, some farmers, and there will be blood on someone's hands, because this is a tax that people cannot sustain, particularly as we are going into a drought. It is horrible out there at the moment. Feeding fodder – fodder is hard to find.

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, he is talking about a bill that was passed through this place last week, rather than the bill that is in front of him.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. The lead speaker gets a little bit of latitude and did connect it to the bill at the start, but I do encourage the member for Ovens Valley to come back to the bill at hand.

Tim McCURDY: Why I was talking about that other tax, which I will not talk about now, is because we are now introducing two more taxes. That is why – I was just trying to draw those parallels about the taxes that are coming in this bill. As I said, it is turning to pubs and clubs, and the gambling legislation sets the scene to start turning towards pubs and clubs. They are going to start charging premium payment. They have not said yet whether that is going to be up-front or whether it is going to be annual or how that premium payment will be charged for both monitoring licences and also lotteries. We will find that out, no doubt, after the bill goes through this place.

The bill has been introduced in order to streamline and consolidate the process of applying for licences across the gaming sector. While well intentioned, as I said, in some areas it does present several significant issues, particularly the imposition of those two new taxes under the guise of premium payments. I just want to touch on that in the bill. Certainly the Minister for Police at the table actually did the second-reading speech. Just for those who have not read the bill, because I know many on the other side just get their notes and go through the notes but actually have not read the bill, the minister at the table, who did the second-reading speech, said:

The Bill makes changes to the monitoring licensing framework to provide options that will maximise the state's ability to extract value for Victorians from monitoring services after the expiry of the current licence in 2027.

He went on to say:

These changes will maximise the state's ability to extract value for Victorians from public lotteries after the expiry of the licence in 2028.

Those are the premium payments that I talked about. I see members nodding; they agree there are premium payments.

Iwan Walters interjected.

Tim McCURDY: In the bill, clause 7 says, member for Greenvale, the premium payment is a tax. I will just say that again: the premium payment is a tax – 'an amount or amounts equal to a premium payment'. Anyone who wants to think that this is not a new tax, read the second-reading statement and read the bill. It is actually in there, and it says the premium payment is a tax.

Try your hardest to deny that when you get your opportunity to speak. At the end of the day, it is written in the bill, it is written in the second-reading speech.

We know the purpose of the bill is to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991 in order to improve operational aspects of gambling regulation. It will align processes across various gambling licensing types and introduce mechanisms for premium payments – creating a new tax – as well as making other amendments to the legislation, particularly around modernising gendered language. There are several main provisions to the bill that will impact a wide variety of operators around Victoria. While there seems to be a bit of substance in the bill, much of it is actually minor and technical. I did have a chuckle when the member for Yan Yean, I think, in the government business program was talking about harm minimisation. We are very supportive of anything that has to do with harm minimisation; she just picked the wrong bill to talk about. There was a bit of that in the last bill, and the carded play was in the last bill as well, and there is a little bit on carded play in this bill, but the fundamental part of this bill is not about harm minimisation, it is about this new tax and premium payments. The member for Yan Yean should maybe go on and read the bill and not just take up the notes that are handed to her.

Monitoring licence changes is the big-ticket item in the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill. The monitoring licence changes are very interesting as they do not reflect a huge industry need – it is not

the industry who has asked for this – and reduce transparency in the licence tender process. This bill replaces the 15-year term that currently exists in Victoria. The member for Malvern, when he was Treasurer, awarded the last monitoring contract back in 2012 – he actually did it in 2011 to start in 2012 – and that is why it expires 15 years later, in 2027. This bill replaces that 15-year term with a flexible period set by the minister. Hang on, we no longer have a 15-year term for this monitoring licence, like they do in New South Wales and Queensland. The minister says, ‘Trust me, I will decide how long this monitoring term is,’ whether it is one year, whether it is five years, or who knows, 15 or even 20 years. I just hope that they do not make this an extremely long term in order to extract better value from Victorians and be able to charge an up-front payment early in the piece, which would be next year, and prop up the budget that the government has so much trouble managing.

What the licence term does is it creates uncertainty for licence-holders and potential bidders. We know it went out for expression of interest in October last year. That expression of interest closed in January this year. No doubt there will be an announcement, I suspect not long after this legislation goes through the Parliament, about who will win that monitoring licence. As we know, it is Intralot who have that licence now currently, and I am sure there will be other worldwide companies that will be vying for that licence. But as I say, we do not know how long it is. It is not a fixed 15-year licence anymore if this bill gets through. As I say, it creates uncertainty for licence-holders. Despite asking during the briefing for some assurances or guidance about the term length or the range that is acceptable, the government did not seem to have one, or did not want to give it to us anyway. As I say, the current licence is 15 years. This bill means the licence could be one year, could be five years or whatever takes the fancy of the minister. This government is not immune to changing rules and regulations when contracts get made, and we saw that in the EGMs when they purchased those some years ago and then changed the rules halfway through. That is why I say you cannot ask small businesses to adhere to a contract, say what the contract is and then change it some months or years down the track. That is why we have to be very careful in this same situation with these premium payments.

My concern is there is an unintended impact of limiting and restricting the competitive tendering process by looking at a shorter licence term as it favours the existing licence-holder which has already invested in the technology. Intralot, for example, have already invested in that technology.

They have invested in carded play. If the next licence was for one year or three years, it might knock out potential companies who want to bid for this tender because they would say the investment that they would need to make to get into carded play or for these other premium payments – the investment they would have to do to make sure that you can monitor the 27,000-odd EGMs in Victoria – is not worth their efforts if it is only for three or five years. Obviously over 15 years you can factor that in and say, ‘I’ve got to lose a bit in the short term to make it up in the long term’. Businesses would do that.

The new sections allow the minister to charge a fee – the premium payment – for issuing or renewing a monitoring licence. The payment can be up-front or annual. So again this would be, ‘Surprise, surprise.’ You will be just hit with another tax that could be like with the EGMs, when they said, ‘Okay, when you buy your contract, your licence, you can have it up-front. You can have it interest-free for three or five years, and then if you haven’t paid it off in X amount of time’ – I do not exactly know the time; I think it is about five years – ‘then you’ll pay it off with a bit of interest.’ It could be the same thing with this monitoring licence: a fee comes in, this premium payment, and they could go back to EGM licence holders and say, ‘You all now owe us X amount of dollars per EGM. Either pay it up-front or’ – whether it could be paid annually or paid on the drip-feed I do not really know. But again, it just puts a lot of uncertainty into the industry. This government has a habit of looking for that low-hanging fruit, the easy touch, because there is no way a venue, pub or club that has EGMs can make that money back on the EGMs. That is impossible because that is all set through regulation, and we know that cannot be tampered with. It is what it is, whatever their up-front costs are or are going to be. So that means they have got to make that cost back by putting another dollar or two on the parmi or the pot or whatever it might be in that venue to try –

Members interjecting.

Tim McCURDY: Or a parma, even. If that is the case, we could find other ways that these pubs and clubs will have to then make that premium payment back, and we do not know (a) what it is and (b) how much it is going to be and whether it is annual or whether it is for a five-year period or a 10-year period as we go forward.

Venues are legally required to use the monitoring services. Obviously you have to have the monitoring service if you have poker machines, and the venues are the ones that will pay the cost. With a government that is \$190 billion in debt – or it might have just snuck up to \$194 billion today, I think; gee, it is not much when you say it really quick, is it, member for Narracan, \$194 billion – I do not think the government is going to be paying any of these costs. If there is a premium payment, they will be making sure that it gets passed on to whoever they can, and they will do that at any time possible, like we have seen them do so far. It will likely be passed on to clubs and pubs.

Particularly I know in our small towns, our small rural communities, where there is an RSL or a club with poker machines and they serve meals, they are just a great place for families and communities to gather together and have a feed and discuss the dry conditions, talk about their woes. We do not want to find that we then start taxing these venues to the point where – they are good competition for the local pub or somewhere else around town – all of a sudden they start to narrow their scope, because somebody has to charge a bit more because they have been taxed somewhere else. So this is a flow-on effect of what that tax might do. We know that those venues operate on really small margins, and additionally the cost of that monitoring service could put them in a very poor financial situation. Or there could be the decision that they put off a staff member because they have got an extra fee that they have to find for this monitoring service. That could be what makes the decision: ‘Well, somebody has to go.’

But my biggest concern is that there is no transparency or cap on the premium amounts – that the government may once again use this as a way to prop up their budget. They have done it before, and they will do it again.

The venues have expressed their concern that since the government will not provide a figure but supposedly will let the market determine the premium payment, they do not know what costs they will be contending with. At the same time it also drives away a competitive process by disincentivising a company from investing in monitoring technology if they already have a premium for the licence. While the addition of premium payment is not unheard of, with many of the other gaming licences requiring one, the monitoring licence has not had such a premium payment in place, and in the current climate of 60 new or increased taxes we certainly do not need another one. But, as I said, it is not another one, member for Mildura, it is another two.

This bill also aligns the public lottery licence process with other licensing procedures and allows for the department to investigate an applicant to ensure that they are also fit and proper in meeting the requirements, whether it is a Keno operator, so there are other bits in this bill that are not just about the premium payments. The minister can declare exclusive periods for licences. Only one extension per licence is allowed. An extension may include a premium fee – here we go again; this is the one on the lotteries now, not on the poker machines. This is in addition, as the current legislation does not include a premium payment on any extension, only on the application. It remains to be seen what this government will do in the future.

I think there are about 1300 or 1380 lottery outlets around Victoria now. Again, they have always said it is a difficult space that they work in, because as people have come online – if you walk into your local TattsLotto shop or Keno operator in Warragul, member for Narracan, well, they get a percentage, about 10 per cent, of what you spend on the lottery. If you do it on your phone, generally you will find that that all goes to consolidated revenue –not to the government but to the lotteries – and the local outlet does not see the benefits of that or get 10 per cent of that. So they already find themselves under

pressure competing against the online market as opposed to the person who walks in to buy their TattsLotto or Powerball or whatever they buy. That is why I say these 1300 or 1380 outlets will be concerned about any tax that goes on top of them, because they get 10 per cent. I do not know what the average spend of a TattsLotto ticket is, member for Mildura.

Jade Benham: \$27.

Tim McCURDY: It is \$27.

Jade Benham: For a quick pick.

Tim McCURDY: For an eight-game quick pick, \$27. So I think 10 per cent of that, \$2.70 – \$2.70 is not going to go far, but of course if you compound that and you get 100 people coming through, that is terrific. But at the end of the day, when you get \$2.70 of a transaction, you just want to make sure that the tax that comes in to do that transaction is not cutting that in half or whatever it might be. So again, these premium payments are a concern, and as I said, the industry is concerned about them.

The bill also streamlines and clarifies processes for licence transfers, making it easy for a transfer to occur, as well as expanding the powers for a minister to determine an application and the circumstances around the person to whom the licence will be transferred. Again, that is not a bad step forward; it actually helps to smooth the process and make it quicker. The bill allows for the minister to vary the terms of the application and determine an amount to be paid, if any, and in instalments. Again, the Treasurer said today, ‘No new taxes,’ and bang, we have got two within 2 hours of her leaving this place. It also enables the minister to publish a notice in the *Government Gazette*, speeding up the process of transfers by no longer requiring a meeting of the Governor in Council to approve them. Sanctions for breaches are dealt with, including increased disciplinary action, suspension and loss of licence as required.

Now, the payment of winnings – here comes a bit of the froth and bubbles that is in the bill, just to put a bit of legitimacy into this premium payment that they are they are trying to push through, and certainly the modernisation. If you are a small country pub or club, you have to write a cheque out for any payments over \$1000 because you cannot pay it out in cash – I support that idea. But now no longer do you have to pay by cheque; you can do an EFT rather than doing a cheque.

We all know that cheques are a dying art in our community, especially in small communities where a lot of businesses now do not even own a chequebook. That change keeps up with the times; there is an opportunity to use EFT for any winnings over \$1000. I do not know about you, member for Mildura, I have never won \$1000 like that, so I have never had to find out whether I get a cheque or whether I get an EFT – I would not know what to do with it.

The modernisation of the payment of winnings reflects evolving financial practices and removes the requirement to pay by cheque, as I said, if it is not feasible for an organisation to have those facilities in place. It reflects a change in the near future, no longer penalising venues who refuse to pay via cheque, reflecting that the banking sector is phasing them out. As I said, winnings over \$1000 can now be paid by EFT. They still can do cheques, but I think most will choose to go with EFT. This reflects the government’s attempts to reduce the money laundering in the sector by increasing that accountability and tracking of winnings, and I support that. There are some things in this bill that we do support – I was going to say minister for Mordialloc, but some say you will never be a minister of the Crown. You have missed out 34 times, so we will call you the minister for Mordialloc. I do support some things in the bill, but on the whole we will be opposing the bill because of the two new taxes that are in this bill. I was just so disappointed that you would not go into consideration in detail, because that would have been an opportunity to flesh out some of these things that we have been talking about, because as I say, there will be members on the other side who will get to their feet and complain that we are being critical of the government and ‘It’s not a new tax.’ I have had a few people already tell me it is not a new tax, but for those who –

Jade Benham interjected.

Tim McCURDY: Yes, I may even repeat that before my time is through – this ‘premium payment’. It just says in the bill, member for Mildura, it ‘is a tax’. In clause 7, if you are looking for it just out of interest, it says it ‘is a tax’. There is the money laundering sorted. It is also expected to be well received, this modern and practical change of going to EFT rather than cheques.

As highlighted, the bill also makes a variety of other amendments that are broad and less consequential, like removing gendered language in legislation; adjusting commencement dates for alignment; allowing matters to go to the review panel directly, bypassing the Governor-in-Council; and making some housekeeping changes to streamline legal processes. With their impact most of those changes are minor and administrative, and most of those changes are, again, supported, welcomed, by the industry. The member for Mildura has just found that tax. Is it in the bill?

Jade Benham interjected.

Tim McCURDY: It is actually in the bill. However, two major concerns still exist. I have touched on before the premium payment. I think I might have said that a couple of times during this contribution. The minister for Mordialloc, let me just remind him. These changes, in the second-reading speech –

Tim Richardson interjected.

Tim McCURDY: Oh, you do not want to hear it?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): Through the Chair.

Tim McCURDY: I thought the member for Mordialloc stepped out of the chamber and missed some of this important contribution. I was just going to give him the key factors in case he has not read the bill, like most of the others.

As I say, passing down those costs, it will affect our RSLs, and we have got a great RSL in Wangaratta. They support our veterans. They are a great venue for people to go and have a feed. They can have a punt, and they can have a go on the gaming machines. It is all very, very responsible gambling and very, very responsible consumption of alcohol. They support our veterans, and that is the key role of our RSLs. I just do not understand why we would want to put any more imposts on our clubs and pubs and RSLs, because it may not rain in Melbourne that much either –

Jade Benham interjected.

Tim McCURDY: Well, it has not rained that much this year, member for Mildura, but it really is important that it rains in our regional areas, because we grow the food that comes to Melbourne, that goes into the supermarket, that goes into their houses.

When that rain has not come we have to be a little bit careful because we all run on very, very fine margins nowadays. There are not oodles of cash stacked away like some people think. Farmers do their best. If they are cattle farmers they try to have a surplus of hay or silage and put it away for a rainy day – or a non-rainy day, as it might be. Farmers put that aside. In fact I was up in the member for Benambra’s patch just recently at a place called Walwa, just over the river from Jingellic in New South Wales, and there was a guy there telling me that he was opening up a silage pit that was 17 years old. He put the silage in there 17 years ago and has not had to touch it. It is very, very good country up there and very reliable country, but this year it is not reliable, and when it is not reliable it certainly turns nasty very quickly. Having had silage put away for 17 years, you would notice when you actually have to go and open that pit and say, ‘Okay, what happens when this pit runs out?’ I think I said last week in this chamber that even if it rains tomorrow it does not mean grass is going to grow tomorrow. It greens up, it gets cold and not much grows until about August from now on in. So people who are handfeeding today will still be handfeeding in June, July and part of August, because nothing really grows in the wintertime. If you get an early break around Anzac Day – you have got warmer weather

and warm ground temperature – you will find you have got feed by mid-June. It has not rained, and if it rained today, do not expect to say, ‘The drought funding can stop. We can finish all this now’, because that is simply not the case. It is quite concerning. Anything that puts extra burdens or imposts on country people we are very mindful of.

I would say the same to city people. The cost of living is affecting people in metropolitan Melbourne as well, and the investment last week of I think \$350 million in free transport – is it free transport for under 18s? – is a great policy, terrific policy, \$350 million, and yet the farmers I think on the same day, it was Friday, got \$15 million to spread across all of regional Victoria. All I ask is that it be fair. Just be fair.

Jade Benham interjected.

Tim McCURDY: It is in infrastructure, and regardless of whether it helps or not, be a little fairer. I am not knocking the fact that people with cost-of-living concerns in Melbourne are going to get free public transport for kids under 18. I do not have a problem with that. But let us be fair and at least let us square the ledger a little bit. That is what I get concerned about. I know I am getting away from the bill a little bit, but what I am saying is when rural communities are under pressure like they are now, any tax, even a small tax – we do not know what this tax is going to be – will still get fed down through our pubs and clubs as we go forward.

I am just about out of time, which is a shame, because I know the member for Mordialloc was going to ask for an extension of time, but I will stop him because I think I have said enough. I did mention earlier on about these two new taxes, and I mentioned it a couple of times, and I am glad that the member for Mordialloc has got them now and understands it, and I will be interested to hear his contribution. But as I say, it is a tax on business. It is a tax on our local pubs, clubs and community centres, and certainly it flows on to those customers. Those customers are feeling cost-of-living pressures just like metropolitan Melbourne is. They are feeling the cost-of-living pressures as well. Any small tax like this one I am still very concerned about. We will be opposing this bill and certainly looking to make some amendments in the other place.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:14): Acting Speaker Tak, it is great to see you in the chair, as always. It is great to rise and speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and follow an interesting journey there from the shadow minister and member for Ovens Valley going from gambling to public transport to everything in between. I was not quite following for a number of minutes, but it was an interesting sort of journey and the most low-key way to oppose a bill I have ever seen. That was just so low key. If you were not really paying attention you would not know where they were at on that bill, but it is good to see they have not just moved another reasoned amendment. The member for Ovens Valley at least, like the Nationals do, has actually put in a bit of work rather than just coming into this place, moving a reasoned amendment and saying, ‘Push it out into the never-never.’ You get the feeling that this shadow political party just makes a bit more contribution. You saw the member for Ovens Valley. You could argue that his back is a bit sore from carrying some of that team over there in the Liberal Party, because we have barely got a Liberal member in this chamber at the moment.

The junior coalition party members are again carrying the cart. We have seen that federally today where they have walked off the tools and they have had enough of the coalition agreement. I wondered if the member for Ovens Valley’s contribution was from the position of the coalition or whether it was from the National Party. We do not have any Liberals in here to clarify if they have got a different policy position. It was curious to see the member for Ovens Valley –

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, he is going into the federal sphere here. We are talking about a bill that is in the state Parliament.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): That is not a point of order.

Tim RICHARDSON: I love it when the fish jumps on the hook – you do not even need bait. That is the member for Narracan; he just jumps on the hook straightaway. Thank you very much, member for Narracan. But this is a really important bit of legislation around the flexibility of licences for monitoring gaming machines, gambling venues and their operation of machines and also licences around public lotteries. I would have thought that a shadow minister would think about extracting more value for Victorians from those significant licences, the terms that they extend.

What the member for Ovens Valley was contending was to not have any kind of fund whatsoever, contending that we should not be extracting value that is in the budget and listed in the bottom line of contributions made over some 15-year licences that come to a conclusion in 2026, 2027, 2028. And you wonder: was that the contention of the member for Ovens Valley? He is really stalwart in defence of having the licensing scheme in place here. Was the inverse of that contention that we should not be charging, that that would be a hit on the bottom line and that these gambling operators and the single monitor that will be in place should not pay a premium in Victoria? It was just an extraordinary contribution around a premium that extracts value from organisations that have long-running contracts in lottery and gambling, that we should not have them pay a premium to contribute to our state. If that is the policy position put forward in the stalwart defence of those organisations, I would like for those opposite to clarify whether they would be taking funds away from that contribution that goes towards gambling harm reduction, that goes towards the maintenance of this sector and industry, because these reforms come on the back of significant reforms in the gaming industry.

I take up some of the criticisms that were put forward. The suggestion that we have not been active in this policy space is just extraordinary. We have had some of the biggest reforms in our state through gambling regulation and reform and harm minimisation that we have seen in recent memory. We remember when the member for Williamstown, the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation at the time, stood out with victim-survivors of gambling harm, with their lived experience and their stories, the mental health and wellbeing, the passion and energy that she brought to make that bill possible and the reforms that came forward and more elements around harm reduction and minimisation that go into why we have premiums, why we have a structured system like that – it is because of those that participate legally in gaming and public lotteries, we know that an estimated one in five experience harm. Let us just put that on the record. What do we think the contribution to the baseline means? It means ensuring that the state has the revenue to fund the services that we need to address the harm that people are subjected to, those that are impacted by gambling. It could be as high as one in five people that are impacted, that might have gambling challenges over their time and experience gambling harm – that is some 330,000 Victorians. We know that the costs of that can be up to \$7 billion annually, which is a significant impact. When we think about the whole package of reforms and what the sector and the journey the whole sector has been on over that time, it is really important going forward.

These amendments are sensible. These amendments allow for flexibility for the minister to set the term limits and extensions to get value for Victorian taxpayers and Victorians more broadly, to be in line with other jurisdictions and what is contemporary and for the minister to do that on behalf of all Victorians in those negotiations and what contracts and experiences might be going forward.

So I am curious around the sort of storied journey of the member for Ovens Valley and the contribution that was made, because I think that would make sense with the contribution of this sector, the taxing arrangements that are in place and the harm contribution and minimisation. The notion and the whole frame the member for Ovens Valley was putting forward was that there should be no contribution. Basically in the waffled 30 minutes and 1800 seconds of contribution – if you could find it through public transport, grass and other things that he was talking about – what the contention was was they would actually have no contribution from this sector for long-form years of agreement. I thought, ‘That’s extraordinary.’ I do not know whether that has been through a shadow cabinet contribution or a shadow Treasury contribution, because that would set a dangerous and harmful precedent of long-form licensing not extracting value for Victorians, given the challenges across the sector as well.

So let us just reiterate some of the key things in relation to this and the notion that this is Henny Penny and the sky is falling in some of these changes the member for Ovens Valley puts forward. It empowers the minister to determine the terms of licences – that is important, the flexibility that is put in place there. It empowers the minister to direct the monitoring licensee to provide other regulatory compliance systems and mechanisms, so when the monitoring licensee – normally that is a one-entity holder – implements it, how that will be implemented, what reasonable costs will be set forward and also the fact – as I saw in the second reading – that this is subject to an independent review as well. So that is an important element and hallmark as well with some of those changes and costs that will be part of modernisation and technology changes. Also we will see gaming machines really being superseded over time by the huge emergence of online gaming and the impact that has. So those changes make a lot of sense. It is empowering the minister to require a premium payment as consideration for a licence or licence extension. So are they suggesting then that Victorians should underpin and subsidise the gaming industry – is that the contention of those opposite – Tattersalls, Keno and others? Is that the contention that has been put forward, that now suddenly those opposite want significant tax breaks for the industry? What is the contention that has been put forward by the member for Ovens Valley? Maybe the member for Narracan can come in and rescue this and salvage this contribution, because it was all over the shop like we have never seen before. I know the lead speaker gets a bit of latitude, but is the notion that we would have flexibility from a minister, which could be licences of 10-, 15-, 20-year extensions, to then get value for Victorian taxpayers and to be able to determine that to the best of their ability – the inverse being what, then? To then subsidise the sector is what basically those opposite are putting forward.

Then there are the changes that will be made in terms of the minister's discretion and those powers – we have seen that in other bills as well. We have seen that in regulations that have been put forward by the former minister and by the current minister in the other place. These are changes to what are long-running contracts that impact on the state, and it makes sense into the future. That notion of ensuring and delivering public value I think is very well played out in the in the minister's second reading that has been put forward on behalf of the minister by the Minister for Police and member for Ivanhoe.

I also just want to say that there are important provisions in this bill around stronger tools for managing monitoring licence integrity, including clearer powers to require information sharing. I mean, those opposite are opposed to that as a whole. They could have in their rant put forward a reasoned amendment that called this out, but they chose not to. They chose to oppose the bill on its whole and once again not do the heavy work or the heavy lifting that oppositions should do, once again. It is just more of the same from those opposite: oppose, block, be opposed to value for money, be opposed to being on the side of Victorians and taxpayers. I am looking forward to hearing those opposite in their contributions.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:24): I rise to make some comments on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and this is the first bill we have had today after the government's great big budget fail. 'Doing what matters most' is what it is titled, I think. Well, certainly there are a lot of Victorians that do not matter according to the Allan Labor government. We saw that today. Thousands of volunteers out on the steps of Parliament that are so angry that the government have ramped up another new tax – \$2.1 billion to fill a black hole. Volunteers, farmers, every Victorian, every small business will be hit with this great big new tax.

The Treasurer came out just before the budget and said, 'There'll be no new taxes.' So we have seen that tax and this tax that we are talking to today in this gambling budget.

Nina Taylor: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it would be preferable to keep to the bill at hand. That would be good.

Wayne Farnham: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the debate has been wide, and the Deputy Speaker allowed it to go that wide.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): There is no point of order.

David SOUTHWICK: This government, including the member for Albert Park, is just embarrassed of these big taxes that it does. We did not see the member for Albert Park – we did not see any government members – out on the steps of Parliament fronting the public, dealing with these big taxes.

There are two new taxes in this gambling bill that we are dealing with today, and there was another great big tax, an emergency services tax – \$2.1 billion already announced – at a time when the Treasurer came out and said there will be no new taxes. How can you believe anything this government says when only just before the budget we had the emergency services tax and now we have got two new taxes in this gambling legislation bill? What an embarrassment.

The only reason this government are doing this is because they are broke, and Victorians are left paying the price. They are trying to fill the big black hole and claim there is a surplus, but at the end of the day who is paying for it? Even in this bill we have got people that go out to the TattsLotto lottery and spend their hard-earned on hopefully trying to win their fortune or a few dollars or whatever it might be – hardworking mums, dads and families – being slugged with an additional tax. Where will this government stop? They will not stop because they are addicted to tax. They are addicted to taking taxpayers money to fill the big black hole, because they keep wasting every single thing that they do. We have seen it through the budget, and specifically on this bill we are seeing many small clubs that will be hit hard because of a government that cannot even manage the gambling portfolio, the whole gaming portfolio, which you would think would have heaps of money rolling in and should be an easy portfolio to manage. But no, what have we seen today? We have seen a premium payment to extract better value for the monitoring of licences for gaming machines. We have seen, in addition to that, additional money applied to lottery tickets – premium payments for those as well.

It is the gaming machines amendments which will hit small businesses and small clubs the hardest, including two not-for-profit community clubs, the Caulfield RSL and the Elsternwick Club, which is the Elsternwick bowls club, which dates back to 1899. This is one of the clubs in my area that had entitlements for pokie machines. The idea when they were first awarded these licences was that hopefully that was going to subsidise the club, the bowling greens and the open space and ensure that club continued to survive. Well, unfortunately, that was not the case. Unfortunately, this club fell into liquidation, despite trying to talk the Allan Labor government into helping them out of the huge tax burden from these gaming machines. They wanted to hand them back. They just said, ‘Look, these aren’t working for us. We can’t make a go of these pokie machines. Just take them back.’ And the government said, ‘No, we’re not going to take them back. You’re stuck with them now.’

Recently the City of Glen Eira had to bail them out and had to buy the Elsternwick Club. Now the club is set for some kind of redevelopment, desperately needed for the money. I even looked in today’s budget, thinking to myself, ‘Well, you know what, this is a club that was reliant on the pokie machines, couldn’t make a go of those and asked the government for a bailout. The government said no. They went into liquidation, had to sell the club – big community open space.’ And I would have thought, doing what matters most and focusing on what matters most, maybe the great people of Elsternwick might be able to get that club saved with a bit more money to ensure that the open space is redeveloped for some kind of community space. Well, no surprises there – not one brass razoo for the Elsternwick Club to maintain that rich history. The government would not bail them out before, when they would not take those pokie licences off them, and now they will not help them out in this current budget.

Again, looking at this new tax grab in these premium payments, as is being proposed here in this gambling legislation bill, if it would have been bad for clubs like Elsternwick before, imagine what it is going to be now.

It is always the smaller clubs that get hit the hardest. The smaller businesses get hit the hardest because Labor does not care about hardworking small businesses, families, people that put their livelihoods on

the line, that work hard to employ people to try and have a go, because when you have a go, you get taxed – very simple. Under Labor, if you have a go, you get taxed, and if you have another go, you get taxed more. You saw it today. It almost brought tears to my eyes – people that have been in the CFA for 20-plus, 30 years, are about to lose their farms because they are the very volunteers that go out and work on those farms and have to volunteer putting fires out.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, can we return to the bill, please.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): It has been a wideranging debate, but I do ask the member to return to the bill.

David SOUTHWICK: Again, this government are just so embarrassed about the tax addiction that they have. Again, the government did not go out and speak to the hardworking farmers and Victorians.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, can we return to the gambling bill, please.

Wayne Farnham: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the Deputy Speaker ruled on this earlier, and the member is in order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): It has been a wideranging debate, but I do ask the member to come back to the bill.

David SOUTHWICK: The member for Eureka did not go out and talk to farmers and did not go out to talk to hardworking Victorians, because she is embarrassed. She is embarrassed about turning her back on Victorians and on emergency services volunteers.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I take offence to those comments, and I ask the member to withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): Offence has been taken. I ask the member to withdraw.

David SOUTHWICK: For what – for not talking to the CFA? Is that the issue?

Michaela Settle: I said I take offence to what you said: that I turned my back on people. I have taken offence to your statements, and I ask you to withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): Just one moment, please. The member for Eureka took offence, and she has asked for a withdrawal.

David SOUTHWICK: I withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): The member to continue.

David SOUTHWICK: Again, this government does not stand up for the hardworking CFA volunteers. There was not one member of the government that was out on the steps today. They are embarrassed because they are gutless. That is what they are: gutless.

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member knows that he has barely touched on the actual bill. He keeps referring to a protest outside the Parliament, which has nothing to do with this bill. You have given him plenty of opportunities to get back to the bill. We have given him plenty of opportunities to get back to the bill. I suggest you might direct him, in the last 51 seconds, to get back to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I was referring specifically to this bill, dealing with two taxes, including an additional tax that this government is doing – again, on the steps of Parliament. Not one single government member turned up on the front steps, because they are gutless. That is what they are: gutless.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): Member for Caulfield, I will rule on the point of order. It has been a wideranging debate, but I do ask you to come back to the bill in the remaining time.

David SOUTHWICK: This government are addicted to tax, addicted to tax because they cannot manage money, and Victorians are paying the price, including every hardworking farmer, every small business and every volunteer that this government has turned their backs on because they are gutless cowards.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (15:34): I am very pleased to stand and speak on this Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I find it extraordinary that those on the other side want to just spend their time in this chamber politicising and running this same tired line that we have heard again and again. This is an important bill, and to some of us in this chamber it really matters. For some of us, it took a lot of guts to look after our families when they had gone to pieces from gambling. Perhaps those on the other side might like to think about the guts that it takes to reform this space.

I want to start my contribution by acknowledging both the previous minister for gaming and of course the current minister. The work that has been done in this incredibly difficult space has been extraordinary. As someone who has suffered gambling harm in a very real way, I am absolutely proud of all that this government has sought to do. I am appalled that today, while we are talking about such an important issue, those on the other side want to trivialise it. The member for Ovens Valley said that we are all reading our speaking notes. Well, let me tell you, they have all been given a couple of lines, and they are all about taxes. All they are doing is delivering politicised speeches while we should be talking about very real and important gambling legislation.

Members interjecting.

Michaela SETTLE: Exactly – it is just social media content, just like their friends in the Greens.

Let us start off by having a look at our record on this. We have established the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, Australia's strongest gambling regulator; mandatory carded play for pokies at Crown, ensuring that players can track and manage their gambling; and a mandatory closure period, so all hotels and clubs closing between 4 am and 10 am. They are the things that have already been legislated, and of course we are also introducing account-based play in gaming machines across Victoria.

Predictably, those on the other side have tried to frame this in some way in relation to a completely different bill and have spoken again and again about this being an increased tax. The member for Ovens Valley suggested that we are just speaking from notes and have not read the legislation, but from his content I can only imagine that he was reading from some sort of ChatGPT-generated concept of what this bill is. When we talk about the monitoring licence – he liked to try and conflate this with some sort of new tax – it is important to understand that the monitoring licensee is one body. That monitoring licensee will have contracts with all of the venues that will set out those premiums.

The member for Caulfield talked about people being trapped with some pokies; I would suggest that it is incredibly important that venue operators read and understand the contracts they are going into when they purchase licences. Within that there will be premium fees, but they will be set out. Really importantly, what I think those on the other side need to understand is that premium payments for the monitoring licence or public lottery licence are hypothecated. That is a word those on the other side might not understand, but 'hypothecated' means that those moneys are set aside. They have one use only, and that is to go to the Hospitals and Charities Fund. While we have listened to them just spout a whole load of political rhetoric instead of discussing an incredibly important debate – they are running this line that it is taxes, taxes, taxes: 'It's all about our debt; it's all about covering our costs' – I would like to point out to them loud and clear that any premium payment for the monitoring licence or public lottery licence is to be hypothecated into the Hospitals and Charities Fund. Perhaps they would like to think a little more deeply before accusing us of raising taxes to cover ourselves off.

As I said, we have done some extraordinary work in this space, and I look forward to continuing that work. The first speaker from the opposition, the member for Ovens Valley, was suggesting that this bill was just technical hoey and was not really doing anything about providing more harm minimisation for gamblers, but what they need to understand is that part of this bill is about creating the settings so indeed we can have precommitment from gamblers. This is enabling legislation to allow us to take forward those commitments that we have made around precommitment from gamblers.

Whilst those on the other side have largely spent their time talking about a protest on the steps, I want to bring this house to the incredibly important work that is contained in this bill. It is a bill for harm minimisation. If we have monitoring bodies in there, if we are setting ourselves up so that we can bring in precommitments, those are all incredibly important aspects of this bill that will make a real difference to people that are suffering from gambling harm.

I did take offence, and I was glad that the member for Caulfield withdrew his comment when he called me gutless. As I said to the member as he left the house, as a single mother of two boys, trying to provide for them, trying to find a house for them and trying to put our lives back together again after my then husband suffered deep, deep issues with gambling, I can assure him that I have got plenty of guts, and I want him to remember that.

This bill is about looking after people. It is about supporting people that are going through terrible times. It might seem functional to those on the other side, or even worse – basically all we have heard in their contributions has been around, as I say, the protest outside. They are ignoring the very important element of this bill so that they can keep shouting out the word ‘taxes’, which appears on their newly minted corflutes, when in fact the money that comes from those premiums, as I said, is going to the children’s hospital fund. Before another one gets up and toes the party line on taxes, perhaps they would like to look a little deeper into the bill and understand where those licence and monitoring moneys will go. I also ask them to think seriously about the fact that this legislation will set us up to roll out precommitment for gamblers.

This is not just a functional bill. It is certainly not a bill just to be played with for political points by the other side. This is a bill about harm minimisation for gamblers. As I have said, having gone through it, I am very, very well aware of what needs to be done to protect families and to protect people, because, frankly, in my opinion, gambling addiction is a mental health issue and we need to be there to support them. Things like mandatory precommitment can support gamblers to stop and to think, as indeed did the wonderful reforms for closing venues. It means gamblers have a moment to take a breath and to think about their children and their families at home.

I would ask those on the other side that when you stand to give us your contribution to these debates, please do not just deliver us the party lines about taxes and being on the steps for a rally. This is an important bill – give it the respect that it deserves. Talk to the bill. And when you are shouting off about this new tax and all that it is going to do, please bear in mind that the moneys raised from the premiums, for starters, will be in the contracts with the licensees, but, most importantly, that money is hypothecated – it is a big word, guys, but it means it goes straight to the children’s hospital fund. I will say one last time: if the member for Caulfield would like to call me gutless, then I would ask him to join gamblers and families who have been through this harm.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:44): I am happy to rise on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and I look forward to my contribution for the next 10 minutes.

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: I am, because I am just going to continue on from where the member for Eureka left off. The member for Eureka insinuated that we are getting up here making up a line about tax and that that is what we are we are sticking to. Well, we did not write the bill, first and foremost. The government wrote the bill. In the bill it actually says:

The premium payment ... is a tax.

An amount or amounts equal to a premium payment ... must be paid –
and this is what it says –

... into the Hospitals and Charities Fund ...

at a time determined by the Treasurer. It does not say the Children's Hospital, it says 'Hospitals and Charities Fund'. The important point of this is we are not making up the line that it is about a tax. It is in the bill. It is in clause 7 of the bill. It clearly states:

The premium payment ... is a tax.

Let us be very clear about that. The coalition did not make that up. This bill comes in 24 hours or thereabouts after the new Treasurer said there will be no new taxes in Victoria in this upcoming budget. The first piece of legislation that comes in has two new taxes – the very first bit of legislation. I remember another Labor person, coming up to the 2014 election, who stood up there proudly and said, 'We will not introduce any new taxes into Victoria.' That was the former Premier Daniel Andrews. Well, 60 new or revised taxes later, here we are. So it is very hard for Victorians to believe it when this government says 'We won't introduce new taxes' when the first bill that comes into this place, 24 hours after the Treasurer said that, states that the premium payment is a tax, first and foremost.

We wanted to go into consideration in detail on this bill. It is important legislation, as those opposite are saying, and parts of it probably are important. Why wouldn't we have consideration in detail? I have heard the excuse, 'We can't do it. The minister is in the other house', but we can move a motion and get the minister to come into this house. We did it today. We had the Treasurer in here. So why can't we do it for this bill? We have just heard the member for Eureka get up and say how important it is. Then back it up: bring the minister in here so we can do consideration in detail. This is one of the reasons why we oppose the bill – because we wanted to have consideration in detail.

There is nothing here that I can see that says that the taxes produced by this bill are not meant to go to the Hospitals and Charity Fund at a time determined by the Treasurer, but what if the Treasurer does not decide to do that? What if the government is in so much trouble financially that the money does not go to that? It would not be the first time the government has changed tack. And when you have got a forecast debt today of \$194 billion with forecast interest at \$1.2 million an hour in this state, one might be a little bit sceptical and say this is a tax grab, that this will not go to where it is meant to go to – and there is good reason for that. It is not as if this government has not bent the truth a little bit in the past. We have seen today the protests on the steps. It has been very well reported. We know the government is addicted to tax. Those opposite will get up and say the volunteer fire service levy is for volunteers – it is not. It is not for volunteers. It is to fill a black hole in the budget. We have heard the budget surplus was meant to be \$1.5 billion, but now it is only \$600 million. So we lost \$900 million somewhere along the way. Who is to say that the revenue created from this bill will not fill another black hole?

There are no guarantees here. There are no guarantees as far as this goes, and this is the problem with the bill. We are seeing thousands of people out the front today that are seriously struggling, and none more than the farmers. With their fire services volunteers levy, some farmers will be paying \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000, up to \$30,000. That is pretty tough to take when they have got to buy in water and they have got to buy in fodder for cattle. That is why the protest was there today. Let us be very clear about that: the protest was there because they are struggling right throughout regional Victoria.

For anyone to dismiss that protest today I think is probably a little bit naive. I would be very careful, members on the other side, publicly stating anything about that protest today, especially if you are in a marginal regional seat, because that may come back to bite you in 2026 very hard, because the people out there are angry today, and for very good reason. They do not trust this government, and why should they, because 24 hours ago they said there would be no new taxes and here we are today with a new tax, straight off.

Why doesn't the government do this for a change: if the body of this bill is so important but the taxes are the cause of debate in the bill, separate the bill. Put the good stuff in a separate bill, and then put forward the real reason you want to introduce it – the taxes attached to it. Put in the harm minimisation and put in all those things that are socially acceptable and are better for the community in a separate bill, because then you will get the support. Here is the really valid point – and it happens all the time with bills: the government wonders why we oppose so many bills, because some bills that come through actually have good stuff in them that we know will help Victorians with harm minimisation, addiction or those things. But then they always put in this crappy part that we cannot support. I could have gone more unparliamentary than that, but I did not. I would love to see the government do that sometime – just separate the bills, put out the good stuff, put it forward, let us support the bill that is going to help people. But do not try to put rubbish into a bill that is meant to be for harm minimisation. It is really that simple, and I do not know why the government does not take that approach. Maybe they just want to sneak it through. Maybe the Treasurer thought, 'We'll get another tax through,' even though 24 hours earlier she said, 'No new taxes.' Daniel Andrews said, 'No new taxes' – here we are 60 taxes later. This is the problem with the government: they always put the sneaky stuff in, and then we get crucified for being the bad guys because we do not support the bills.

It could have gone into consideration in detail. We could have asked the minister. I have said this before and I will say it again – I will give the member for Essendon credit: when he had an important bill that he wanted to get through he sat in that chair for 2 or 3 hours and he did consideration in detail because he knew that WorkCover bill was important. He is the only minister out of everyone over that side that has had the guts to do it. I think more ministers should do it. If you have the conviction behind the paper that you put forward, if you are passionate about the bill you want to get through, then do consideration in detail, explain it to us, let us ask the questions if it is that important – or is this a sneaky little tax bill coming through again by this government, which is too scared to do consideration in detail and answer the questions? If we had consideration in detail, we could have asked the appropriate minister: is the tax that you are going to generate going to go to harm reduction? Remember, where this tax that is getting introduced goes will be determined by the Treasurer – what hospital, what charity. What charity? We do not know. Is it going to go to Guide Dogs Australia? It is not specified in here.

This is the point I am making to the government. I know people on that side will get up and beat us up again about refusing the bill, but they keep putting sneaky stuff in bills so we have to oppose them. Stop being sneaky. Put the good stuff through in a separate bill. Put the stuff through that is going to minimise harm. That is why we oppose it.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (15:54): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and boy oh boy, jeez, you could not believe it, could you? Here we are speaking to a bill which will help public health. It goes through to harm minimisation, yet it becomes about the politics of grievance once again. Is it any wonder that when it came to our recent federal election in every single major capital city in Australia voters turned away from the Liberal Party in droves? It was all about the politics of grievance.

A member interjected.

Gary MAAS: That is right – all about the politics of grievance and not doing what people in those cities or those regional centres would want to see, but continually they will keep backing in Labor governments. Why do they do that? They do that because we say what we are going to do.

Whenever it comes to a gambling debate in this house I tend to always follow the member for Eureka, and isn't she absolutely incredible? I think of how brave the member for Eureka is each and every single time she comes into this place to talk to her life story. And what a powerful advocate she has been in the caucus to just make sure that the laws that we have right in front of us now, the bills that are going to pass this place, come through here after vigorous debate. But quite often all we get from the Liberal Party is talk about tax or what the cost is to small business. Goodness me, our society wants

better than that. They want an opposition that will stand up for people in Victoria. That is what this bill will help do.

This bill adds to the suite of bills on gambling regulation that has been passed in this place. This bill does help with harm reduction. I would just like to note that if you want to pass bills that have something to do with harm reduction, first thing, you have got to be in government. You have got to get to government to be able to create the laws. Time and time again I am so grateful that we have been backed in to do that, because we are able to change laws. When it comes to monitoring, we are able to create the kinds of commissions that we want to have. When money-laundering practices have been occurring, these are the sorts of things you want to have. We have got that; we have got monitoring, and this bill enhances that. We have got oversight. We have been able to introduce carded play. And now as a part of this law, to extend licences for those licensees, an additional fee to the licence, a premium payment, is being asked for, and for what? To be redirected into harm minimisation through the Hospitals and Charities Fund.

I just cannot get over this stale, old narrative that the Liberal Party is stuck in. They are just stuck in the tax vortex. They are stuck in the politics of grievance, and they know it and they cannot get out of it. As they are stuck in it, the number of seats just keeps dwindling and dwindling. You know, we talk about democracy in this great country and we talk about democracy in this great state. I wonder what the opposing force of politics is going to look like, because at the moment there is nothing. There is nothing that is coming from the other side of the chamber.

This Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill strengthens the regulation of gambling in Victoria and ensures the government can extract value from major gambling licences. The reforms are there to ensure that Victoria's licensing processes remain robust, transparent and responsive to new technology and keep adapting to community expectations. The bill will see reform of the monitoring and public lottery licences. It updates the frameworks for issuing the monitoring and public lottery licences, which are due to expire in 2027 and 2028, and it gives the minister more flexibility to set the term of these licences, aligning them with other major gambling licences and helping to secure long-term value for Victorians. This change gives the government greater flexibility to deliver better economic outcomes and modernise the way major gambling licences are awarded, with the safety and harm minimisation of Victorians top of mind.

As I said, the people of Victoria believe in Labor governments. Back in 2019 many of us were talking about inequality and how it is just not addressed through the existence of gambling venues, including poker machines, throughout the suburbs, the outer suburbs of Melbourne in particular, and regional Victoria.

Back then I said that it struck at the heart of electorates that we had long represented and we needed to acknowledge that the time had come to take action. Back then if you were to count every single voter in Narre Warren South, they would have lost about \$650 each, each and every year, through gambling in my electorate. That figure has not stayed static, and it has not gone down. The figure continues to go higher and is now closer to \$1000 per household for gaming-related losses each year. That is just not good enough, and it is the reason why we need laws like this.

The local government area where the seat of Narre Warren South sits is the City of Casey, and it has the second-highest pokies expenditure in the state. Three billion dollars is lost by Victorians every year through poker machines, and people are losing this money in some of our lowest socio-economic areas. It is not fun for these people to be going to pokies venues and just playing away. It is not fun. It is a public health issue. It is addiction. It is concerning, especially because it has impacts on one's mental health and family situations through domestic violence and the increased use of drugs and alcohol. Together with dodgy practices in the gaming industry, this just will not be tolerated, because we know it does have a real impact on Victorians.

We remember back in 2021 the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence exposed some of the questionable conduct undertaken by the casino operator Crown. The government accepted all the findings of that royal commission and took immediate action. I acknowledge the work that Crown have undertaken in that time in responding to the reforms, including already making the transition to mandated carded play. Licensees must understand and comply with their gaming licence and legal obligations, but they must also understand and comply with the social licence as well – that is, ensuring that the industry acts with integrity and honesty in the protection of the Victorian community. This is why we established the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, Australia's strongest gambling regulator, with enhanced oversight and enforcement powers. We are currently also making reforms to further reduce gambling harm and money laundering, including introducing account-based play across electronic gaming machines in Victoria, implementing load-up limits on pokies to be capped at \$100 and making it mandatory for new electronic gaming machines to have a spin rate of a minimum of 3 seconds per game.

In each speech that I give to this place that is gambling related I always thank the Alliance for Gambling Reform for the incredible work that they do in advocating for the prevention of gambling harm. This organisation will often bring in lived-experience members of the community, people who have suffered the public health and addiction issues that go around being addicted to pokies and other forms of gambling as well. When they come and tell their stories, you see why it is needed – why it is absolutely essential that we have laws such as the one that we are passing today. The thing is that when you speak to lived-experience people, they also understand that Labor governments are there for them. They also understand that Labor governments consult, that they work with industry and that they work with stakeholders and the community as well to help strengthen oversight, reform current systems, improve support services and increase education around gambling.

The bill itself modernises Victoria's gambling licence framework. It improves integrity safeguards, it supports responsible gambling initiatives and it is another step forward in providing protections for our most vulnerable in society. This is a good bill, and I commend it to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (16:04): I rise to make a contribution to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It has been interesting listening to other contributions from both sides of the house. I am sure my local newsagent is going to be devastated that they have been thrown in the same bucket as some dodgy gambling operators and money launderers and the evils that are gambling.

No-one on this side of the house is saying that we should not be working towards gambling harm minimisation – that is not what we are saying at all. This bill does nothing to help that – nothing to help that at all. I have said before when speaking on gambling legislation in this place that right now – following the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and with other measures introduced – I know that some of my local venues are very, very strict on making sure they are compliant. They go above and beyond. They know a lot of their regulars, and they do a lot of work to minimise harm.

What this bill does is introduce two new taxes. Again, there are local newsagents that are also Tattersall's outlets. Newsagents are a dying business, particularly in regional areas. With the demise of the print version of the local paper – or of every paper really – newsagents are finding it harder and harder to stay in business, and I know of at least three that have closed down in the last 12 months because of the extra tax burden and how hard it is to do business in this state. And now they are going to be forced to have another one, not 24 hours after the Treasurer professed that there would be no new taxes. First bill up: two new taxes. So you could understand perhaps why we are opposed to it on this side of the house.

While some of the changes in the bill are to update and consolidate the process for gambling licences, there are a few major changes that are likely to have an impact on the industry that is quite unfavourable. In my community some of these venues and small businesses, such as newsagents, which are often Tatts outlets, are also the greatest supporters of community clubs, schools and events.

In fact the Mildura RSL – this will hit them – are a great RSL club, and they do a huge amount. Their Anzac Day services every year are wonderful. Their venue itself is fantastic. They are even supporters of the Farnsworth Lochhead Lowe Scholarship to send students on a pilgrimage to trek Kokoda in July of this year, which will allow some direct descendants of those that were killed during Australia's campaign in Papua New Guinea to go there for the first time. That is a gaming venue; that is not evil. The Gateway Mildura are, again, huge supporters with the amount of money that they give back and put into community groups, into sports teams. Anything that they possibly can support they absolutely do because they are locally owned, they are locally operated and they understand what is needed. They are continuously giving back. They are also one of the venues, as well as the Mildura RSL and the Mildura Working Man's Club, that are very stringent on making sure they are compliant with everything, not just with gaming but with the responsible service of alcohol, the responsible service of gambling – all of that. They are intent on making sure harm is minimised because they know it is bad for business.

But what else is bad for business? More taxes, more red tape, more compliance. It is never-ending, so you can see why a few thousand people turned out today. Yes, a lot of them are CFA volunteers, a lot of them are career firefighters and a lot of them are farmers, but it is the straw that is breaking the camel's back. As I said earlier, there is only so much that we can put up with – and we are done. For the Treasurer to say yesterday, 'There will be no new taxes', and then on the very next day introduce two new taxes – I mean, the absolute arrogance of this government. It is hypocrisy; it is the definition of hypocrisy. For those that say it is not, the explanatory memorandum says about clause 7:

The Minister is also empowered to require the monitoring licensee to pay a premium payment as consideration for the extension of the monitoring licence. The premium payment is a tax and an amount or amounts equal to the premium payment must be paid into the Hospitals and Charities Fund ...

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Which charities? Like the member for Narracan said, which charities? We do not know which charities. It could be a dodgy charity. If we are going to talk about dodgy gaming venues, let us talk about some charities that are set up – for what? We know that they exist.

We do not know exactly; there is no guarantee. You cannot trust this government to put the money where they say it is going to go. But to impose more taxes on a day when a budget is handed down, 24 hours after the Treasurer said, 'No new taxes' – there are two, and this will impact 1380 outlets across the state. We are slugging the venues. Like I said, in communities right across the state – not just mine but right across the state – a lot of them are locally owned: newsagents that are Tatts outlets, community clubs and pubs. These are the ones that are going to be paying for this. If they close down, then problem gamblers are still going to find a way to gamble. You are pushing people to lose their homes in their homes. The online sector is largely unregulated. What does that do for gambling harm minimisation? Nothing that I can see.

We saw the thousands of people on the steps of Parliament today, last week and the week before, and I tell you what, with all of the taxes that have been imposed, farmers and Victorians will need to win TattsLotto to be able to pay all the taxes that they have to pay. There might even be an uptake in Tatts tickets and quick picks. I am sure the member for Murray Plains is a regular Tatts player.

A member interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Not that silly. I know that there will be a few that are hanging on because of the advertising that is currently allowed – and I know that is federal jurisdiction, but that has not stopped members on the other side talking about federal issues today. I am sure that there will be those that are really trying to manifest a TattsLotto win because they need it, particularly when the government releases a \$350 million public transport package, which is great – free transport for those under 18 – but a \$15 million drought fund for infrastructure, which is of no help to food and fibre producers.

Michaela Settle: What about the rebate for the ESVF?

Jade BENHAM: Let us talk about the rebate on that levy. It is capped. If you want to talk about the amount of money that they are going to have to pay in this levy, they have to apply for it time after time after time. The administration that is required is absolutely ridiculous. And then a \$15 million drought fund for infrastructure – what, to build a hay shed to put no hay in or to build a shed to put no feed in? How ridiculous to droughtproof Victoria during a drought. This is a fund that should be available well before a drought hits. This is a lack of foresight. A \$15 million announced for certain LGAs that does not go anywhere near as far north as it should go is absolutely preposterous. It is another kick in the teeth to farmers and to regional Victorians.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:13): I am very pleased to rise to speak on this important legislation. A certain element that I think has been impressed upon me through the debate today is the fundamental importance of establishing the purpose of the legislation in front of us. I have seen some interesting meandering in and out towards other matters that are not relevant to this bill, and it is very easy to just say, ‘Tax and red tape’ and not unpack the purpose behind the bill and the purpose behind the funds being raised, because fundamentally in government we are here to provide services to our community. I think when we look at the fundamental impact of the changes being brought about, we have to remember the potentially catastrophic impact of addiction when we look at gambling, and that is why this subject matter is handled in such a serious manner.

Those opposite are skirting around that fundamental tenet of making sure that we are continually moving forward and providing appropriate mechanisms to mitigate the risk of people losing their life savings, regardless of what other charitable or community-oriented services that a particular club or otherwise may provide. No-one is resiling from the significant community benefits that a particular club may otherwise contribute to – that has merit. But that does not in any way allow us to avoid the obvious and very integral subject matter that pertains to gambling, and that is the risk of people succumbing to addiction and effectively potentially ruining their lives. I want to commend the member for Eureka for her courage in sharing that very important story about her own personal experiences – not her with the addiction but having to be witness to that – because it reminds us of the fundamental tenets that are driving the reforms that we have before us. When we remember the purpose and we do not just label it tax and red tape – whilst both those terms of themselves have meaning and do matter, so no-one is resiling from that either, I think it is important that we link them to the causes that this legislation is seeking to serve. I hope that is clear for the chamber.

I was concerned about the member for Narracan, who was trying to direct us how we should draft our bills. I thank him for his advice. I am sorry, but I am not particularly aware of his expertise in this regard. But putting that aside, what that could translate to, if I interpret that, is that we should sell out our values as Labor Party members and just simply comply with whatever the opposition deem appropriate. I do not believe that that would be serving our communities appropriately. We are going to continue to make values-based decisions and, accordingly, the legislation will be drafted appropriately. But I thank him for the unsolicited advice. We will not be taking it on on this occasion, particularly as I am not particularly aware of specific expertise in drafting from the member for Narracan.

Putting that aside, what are the fundamental tenets of this bill? One of the things that is very important is making sure that we deliver public value. The government will be able to require a premium payment for the monitoring licence and public lottery licence, ensuring licence-holders contribute fairly to the public good. Bearing in mind the dangers we can say are associated with gambling and addiction, I think that you will see that there is a delicate balance that is being asserted through this bill for good reason. If I take that point further, premiums will be paid into the Hospitals and Charities Fund, supporting health and community outcomes. I heard all sorts of excuses from those opposite saying, ‘Which charity? Which fund?’ It is the Hospitals and Charities Fund, and I think of itself we can see what fundamentally underpins that fund.

We know that harm minimisation, particularly when it comes to gambling but not exclusively, but with regard to the context in which we are debating today, is extremely important. I did find the

conjecture around the specific direction for the money raised going into that fund curious, and I found the cynicism actually rather disturbing. It is like we might as well have said, I do not know, that we were funnelling it into the sea or something. It is very specific that we are saying the Hospitals and Charities Fund. The opposition could elevate the calibre of the argument or the conjecture regarding that aspect of the bill. I thought that was curious at best and disturbing nonetheless. That was unnecessary, and it is not serving the best interests of the community to query the intention but also the directive to deliver funds to that purpose. I think they should resile from that in future. I do not think it adds credit or meaning to the particular points that they are seeking to raise on this bill.

Furthermore, other elements that, in rejecting this bill, the opposition – I think I really do not understand. I have to say it is difficult for me to even articulate, because I do not get why they do not want stronger tools to manage monitoring licence integrity, including clearer powers to require information sharing and responsible gambling standards as a condition of the licence. Why don't they want this? That seems pretty basic, pretty sensible. I am struggling; I am battling. The bill also ensures the monitoring licensee can provide responsible gambling and compliance systems – this would also seem to be a logical, commonsense pathway forward – including tools to prevent money laundering and enable precommitment. This also would seem to be a sensible pathway to follow, and there is nothing sneaky about it, because guess what, the bill is before the house and being debated. There was an assertion: 'Oh, you're sneaking this and that in.' I am saying, 'Hey, the bill's here; it's been circulated. No-one is holding you back. You can transact it here and now.' And we are giving members the opportunity to do so. So I think, again, it is unhelpful language that may actually deter people from seeing the fundamental tenets of this bill.

I should say these systems will help reduce gambling harm. What is wrong with that? They will support better oversight of electronic gaming operations in clubs and hotels. That would seem to be a sound form of regulation and enhancement of regulation, and I think that you can see quite clearly that that is in the best interests of our community. I will go further, because it was alleged by the opposition – well, one of the members – that this does nothing to help in harm minimisation. I reject that proposition outright, because we know that this legislation includes other elements that are really important. We are also, I should say, currently making reforms to further reduce gambling harm and money laundering, including introducing account-based play across EGMs in Victoria and implementing load-up limits on Victorian pokies, meaning the amount of money an individual can put into an EGM has been capped at \$100, down from \$1000. I think even \$100 makes you sort of nervous, but with \$1000 you can see that significant jump, and it can hopefully prevent a person absolutely emptying out their bank account and providing a situation of debt or otherwise from which they can never return or which is a burden over their heads for decades. Who knows? That is the real danger that can face an individual and has indeed faced Victorians and, I am in no doubt, people across the globe when they are looking at gambling harm.

I think it would be advisable if the opposition could reconsider their rather fast and loose attitude to this bill instead of just spinning the tired old narratives of red tape and tax and not getting down to the essence of the bill and querying paying premiums into the Hospitals and Charities Fund as if somehow this is an incorrect way of managing the money when we are looking at putting the money towards effectively harm minimisation. They are querying why we are doing this. Has it come to this with the opposition? Again, it is confusing, but what I would say is it is time to back in these very timely and necessary reforms when we are looking at the best interests of our Victorian community.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (16:24): I too rise with a contribution on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This has been introduced, again, like other bills, to streamline systems and processes, and this time it is about the gambling licensing processes and providing some degree of consistency. Now, that might all sound well and good, but we know it is another tax. The member for Eureka talked about how the opposition mention tax quite a bit. It is because the government introduced tax after tax after tax. The government are addicted, because they cannot grow the

economy. They do not know how to stop spending, so they have to keep introducing taxes. Yesterday we heard the Treasurer come out and say, ‘There will be no new taxes,’ and lo and behold –

Roma Britnell: Just yesterday.

Cindy McLEISH: Just yesterday. And here we are today with a bill that has got two taxes associated with it. We have got the taxes with the monitor, and we have got the taxes with the lottery corporations.

I want to just make sure that the members on the other side know that we are not making this up. If you have a look at the second-reading speech, on the first page it talks about:

The Bill makes changes to the monitoring licensing framework to provide options that will maximise the state’s ability to extract value for Victorians from monitoring services after the expiry of the current licence in 2027.

‘Extract value for Victorians’ – these guys have not been able to do that consistently. And we find within the bill that the explanatory memorandum under clause 7 very clearly says:

The premium payment is a tax ...

It says it is a tax. So for the government members opposite to think this is not a tax bill that we are debating is just false. It is a fallacy to think that.

Every gaming machine in Victoria must be monitored. Currently they are being monitored by Intralot, and venue operators pay a fee to Intralot. In 2011 the then Minister for Gaming issued a licence to Intralot. That licence was for 15 years; it is a fixed-term licence which expires in 2027, which is not so far away. Every poker machine in Victoria must be connected to this system. Intralot, having the licence, have got to conduct services and monitor and carry out activities, maintenance or other work necessary to ensure a continuous and uninterrupted operation of the poker machines or systems. This is one of the things that they are responsible for. They have other responsibilities as well for the detection and continuous recording and monitoring of significant events. This is really important, because it can be a critical tool in detecting both money laundering and gambling harm risks. I am going to touch on money laundering in a moment, but we have seen that the Labor government have really failed here, and a number of ministers have had to dance pretty quickly to try and get on top of some of the issues, as they have failed to regulate in this space too often.

We have got the bill before us, which makes changes to the monitoring licence framework. I do not know if this provides flexibility or lack of transparency or what, but they will have the ability to determine the most appropriate licence term at a point in time, looking for value for the state. Delivering public value is a good thing. That is what governments should be about, but we have seen the Labor government fail continually here. I go back some 15 years or so when we had the fire sale of gaming machine licences, and they undersold huge time what they could have got. The people that were buying these were laughing, actually, because the auction was an absolute joke. It was exposed that the government had missed out on an enormous amount of revenue because they could not do it properly.

We have also had issues with Crown Casino. This was something that was exposed by the media and not the regulators. The regulator here should be doing their job, and this is why these things are important. The list of things that Crown Casino did wrong is quite long; this was confirmed by the findings of inquiries and through the royal commission. What was found was that Crown facilitated money laundering on an epic scale. So it is important that the monitoring licence, as I mentioned earlier, with the poker machines is a tool that can help them look at money laundering, but because we know that the government have failed in their regulation in this space previously, they need to get it right. They failed on an epic scale. It was found that Crown were also consorting with criminal gangs and fast-tracked visas for big gamblers. These are not people we want in our gambling world.

A lot of people do gamble. Some people have huge trouble with that – I hear lots of stories – and require financial counselling. Sometimes I look at the money that is invested in financial counselling; it is not enough. But I also look to see what licensed operators, gaming venues, do and look at Crown and how they look to reduce harm and at the harm minimisation processes that they have in place. I guess many people in this place have been to Crown and had a look and seen firsthand exactly what it is that they do, and that is certainly something that is a good thing.

Back on the specifics of the bill, the minister claims that the addition of a premium payment – tax – will extract better value for the monitoring licence. I have mentioned that is the tax that is specifically in the second-reading speech and in the explanatory memorandum of the bill. Again, it is a bit of a cash grab from Labor to make their budget look better, because we know, had the tax last week not been passed, this government would not have been able to be bragging about this surplus that they have got. I wonder, actually, because the Treasurer was asked about the differences in the change of the rate to farming – down from 189 to 250 – what difference that was going to make to the bottom line. That may in fact take the government out of surplus. But we do not know that for sure because the Treasurer was unable to quantify what differences that would make. That is what happens when you are doing some of these things on the run like was happening last week when we sat.

There are other elements of this bill. Just as we have the monitoring of poker machines, we also have the public lottery licences. The lottery licence is up in 2028, and you see a lot of people that have Powerball things – not necessarily newsagents, little outlets. This is for monitoring and checking out and making sure everything is going well for these licences, because we need people to be operating honestly and transparently, and that is not always happening. As I have said, these are two changes with the lotteries and the poker machines that are tax grabs. They will allow the minister to choose at a time when it suits them – it may or may not be the right time; they get it wrong a lot. I just get a little bit worried about the government having such flexibility and moving away from the system that has been in place.

In addition, the bill also introduces changes in line with phasing out cheques. I had to write out a cheque just recently in my electorate. I had to write out a couple, actually, because we have some people that do the wreaths for Anzac Day who still operate on the cheque system. I think we have to open the bottom drawer somewhere and dust them off when we do that. But we know that cheques are really on their way out, and it staggers me each time that I still need to do that here and there. But it is making it no longer an offence to not provide payment of winnings by cheque if the venue does not have the facilities, and I think that is a fair thing.

As I have talked about, in order to combat money laundering any winnings over \$1,000 from gaming machine and bingo events must be paid through EFT or cheque, actually, depending on the facilities available. So on one hand we are trying to work with the fact that cheques are becoming quite obsolete and definitely no longer used, but some clubs and some people may still like cheques. I know that a lot of people will probably still do the big fat cheque as a stunt when government is handing out grants. People like to have that big fat cheque.

Members interjecting.

Cindy McLEISH: Oh, the Lions club. I do not know how you do it when you have got a big fat EFT to transfer and you might gain some publicity there. But as has been said by previous speakers, this introduces two new taxes, whether the government like it or not, and that is just not the way to be going all of the time.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:34): It is a pleasure this afternoon to rise on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and I will give it to the member for Eildon – at least the member for Eildon actually spoke on the bill and made a contribution touching on the bill, whereas the member for Caulfield, the member for Ovens Valley and many others did not even touch the bill. In fact it is probably fair to say that they were a bit closer to their budget-in-reply speeches, but those are still to

come. I was thoroughly entertained at seeing the member for Caulfield have a go at the member for Eureka, a former farmer, someone that has been touched by gambling and someone that has –

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: I take up that interjection. The point of what I am saying is that perhaps people who are in this house should sometimes probably remain silent and seem stupid rather than open their mouths and remove all doubt. I am not talking about the member for Eildon but members beforehand. It is one thing to make assumptions in this house, but the people in this house also have lived experience. I will go back, to give some levity to this conversation, to how I was thoroughly amused to hear someone try and call someone out on this side of the chamber and the member for Eureka get up on her feet and school that person in, I would say, a classy way. So thank you to the member for Eureka.

As I said previously, I think the member for Eildon is the only person so far who has touched on this bill – we have had people saying that this bill does nothing as far as harm reduction goes, which just is not true. We in this government, on this side of the house, have a great record, a great legacy of harm reduction in regard to gambling. The Allan Labor government has led the way in nation-leading reforms to reduce gambling harm, and this bill builds on those measures.

Something that is very close to my heart – my good friend Peta Murphy chaired the gambling inquiry in federal Parliament. That inquiry made some really good recommendations that we hoped might be discussed more fulsomely and maybe put into practice by now. But in this state we established the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, Australia's strongest gambling regulator, with enhanced oversight and enforcement powers. We introduced mandatory carded play for pokies at Crown, ensuring players can track and manage their gambling, and we also enforced mandatory closure periods for all hotels and clubs, which must close gaming areas between 4 am and 10 am, to reduce extended gambling sessions.

For my community that is, no pun intended, a game changer for people with gambling problems. We found that in Frankston we had a consistent system of one venue closing while another one opened, and they would swap it around on a nightly basis, which I find predatory, especially when you consider the history that Frankston has with pokies. I was just mentioning to the member for Mordialloc before the legacy issue that forced the Frankston Dolphins to go into administration and lose their VFL licence. They were saved. They gained their licence back two years later and now they are they are struggling to get to the top of the ladder. But they will soon, and we have had some great games. But the community jumped on board with that campaign. They saw the damage that the pokies did. They heard the excuse that 'It was the pokies that drove us into debt.' It was not; it was some very, very bad decision-making. I would also say that anyone that decides that an outlaw motorcycle gang member is a good person to become the president of your club – that might be a big mistake. But we have lifted that club out of the mire that they found themselves in. The foundation of their issues certainly was the pokies, and the people that they were attracting to those pokies were not interested in the football club or the community as a whole. And they were suffering, and the community suffered.

We know that in Frankston, Frankston city's nine gaming venues saw a total of \$65.7 million lost on pokies in 2023–24 – I think it is the calendar year. That is \$65.7 million from the pockets of people just in Frankston going into pokies. When I stand up here and I have to talk about gambling legislation, am I willing to admit that people should be able to do whatever they want? Yes, I am, but that comes at a price to the rest of our community, and it comes with a consideration that we do need to put rules around these things, because it is the rest of the community that pays for these issues. \$65.7 million is a lot of money per annum to be leaving the pockets of people in Frankston – and going where exactly? When I hear people in this house looking at this bill and saying that this goes nowhere towards gambling reforms and harm reduction, that is a bit of a misconception, because this bill does make reforms to further reduce gambling harm and money laundering, including introducing account-based play across EGMs in Victoria; implementing load limits on Victorian pokies, meaning the amount of

money an individual can put into an electronic gaming machine is being capped at \$100, down from \$1000; and making it mandatory for all new machines to spin at a minimum rate of 3 seconds per game, slowing the pace of the game down and limiting the amount that can be lost.

For anyone who believes what they are saying about taxes with this bill, that is just outrageous. We will charge a licence fee – that is not a tax. I think they have got themselves in a bit of a pickle and a bit of a downward spiral about taxes today. It is a very simple way of thinking.

As the member for Ovens Valley said, perhaps people should read the bill. I know that people who are interested in this bill and interested in the harm that gambling causes in their communities probably did read this bill. They probably read the explainer. They probably spoke to people in the department and in the advisers offices to ask how this bill would affect their communities. To me, it means that in my community, in the end, I think there will be more fences put around gambling to protect people from losing their house, from having to rob their granddaughter's piggy bank for change. These are some of the really sad stories that have come through my office. This bill goes a long way to making sure that we are doing what we said we would do a long time ago. Although we are in state Parliament, I really do wish that some of our federal colleagues would take some of the inquiry recommendations from a good friend of our community in Dunkley, Peta Murphy, which were hard fought for, because that inquiry listened to some of the most horrible stories about people's lived experience with gambling. They made those inquiry recommendations based on those stories and based on that lived experience. Those recommendations have seen the light of day, but they do deserve to be put in place, because they will be protecting communities like ours.

The last thing I would like to say is I think everybody in this house does appreciate the dangers of gambling, but occasionally we get someone who might have a relationship with Australian Hotels Association or something like that who wants to come out and say, 'Just do what you want.' But that is a little bit like saying everyone should be able to smoke and we do not have to tax it. When people do what they want, it costs our community. I am very reluctant to say that we should ban gambling altogether. I think there will be a day that comes that we do, though – I really do. I have spent enough time in the local bars and pubs just sitting there looking at people sometimes utilising these machines, and not one of them comes up to me and says, 'Hey, it's my shout. I just paid off my house. I put my kids through college. I'm going to buy a new car.' No – never, ever. It never, ever happens, because these machines are designed to take money off people, not give money to people, and that is the hard and fast fact of it. They are addictive and so is the environment they are put in. With that, I thank everyone for their contributions, and I commend this bill to the house.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:44): I rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and I do so beginning with some insights that I always find it strange talking about gambling legislation in this house, because I think we all, whether we wish to admit it or not, debate legislation that is designed to ensure that an industry can continue to operate. I support the continuing operation of the industry. It supports many hundreds of thousands of people, not only those who work in the EGM sections of a lot of operators, hotels and pubs, but those who work in the food and hospitality part of those operations. There are a lot of people and many hundreds of thousands of families who depend on this industry being successful. On the other hand, we are all keenly aware of the devastating impacts that gambling harm can have, and I find as a legislator that is a particularly hard road to travel on at times.

This bill I think has been overstated in terms of what it might do for those very laudable and noble purposes, I have to say. Like my colleagues, I acknowledge that the government was very eager to say this week that there would be no new taxes in today's budget but here we are debating a bill which does precisely that. I like and respect the member for Frankston very much, but I think he does need to read clause 7 of the bill, which does characterise the premium payment as a tax. That is T-A-X – tax. There can be no doubt about that.

I do want to make some observations, though, about the approach the government has to this. The first observation I want to make is that, having characterised the premium payment, which has been traversed by other speakers earlier in the debate, what the bill does is confer on the minister complete discretion as to what that tax might be. I think it does raise a serious question not only about taxation policy but about legislative policy and how we approach the prescription of taxation rates. It is normally the case that a tax rate of this magnitude might come before the house in some way or be prescribed in some manner in some subordinate instrument, but here we have a bill – it may not be the first bill that has ever done this, but it is a bill that we are dealing with at the moment – which confers on the minister a power which is hard to scrutinise. It is not clear from the bill how this chamber or any other agency can actually interrogate the manner in which the minister determines what that premium payment will be and what influences the minister will take into account in determining what that premium payment will be.

And of course we know that the premium payment, once determined, will be passed on. I am sure all members speak to their venue operators in their own electorates, and like mine, they will tell you that the viability of different sections of their operations varies. The gaming section might not deliver as much, but it draws people in who might have a meal or a drink at the bar or might come in to see some live entertainment in the venue. The idea that this can just be imposed and it is all good because it is supposed to go to the Hospitals and Charities Fund is not altogether accurate. I think we have to accept that these costs, this additional tax – clearly that is what it is – will be passed on.

So who pays when these taxes are imposed? We know that taxes are passed on, and it is punters – mums and dads, patrons who will go to these venues even if they are not using the gaming machines and are not going there for the gaming machine experience but might be going there for a meal or to see a live band – who one way or another are going to pay higher prices because of that. So we are very concerned on this side of the house, amongst the reasons that have been ventilated earlier in the debate, about what impacts this new tax will have on prices in these venues. People who can least afford it will be paying for this additional tax, as it will get passed on.

I want to make some comments, though, about the Hospitals and Charities Fund. Now, obviously that is an important fund; it serves a very important purpose. We all, I think to a person, agree in a heated fashion that we want revenue from the fees and charges that venue operators and licensees will pay to go to laudable social purposes, whether it is clinical care or social supports for families and people affected by gambling addiction and gambling harms. But let us understand that the bill is a bit unclear about how the money that is to be raised from this new tax will actually make its way to the Hospitals and Charities Fund. It is true that the bill does say that the money that is raised is to go to the Hospitals and Charities Fund. But here is the thing: what the bill says is that the money raised goes into consolidated revenue and then the minister, in the minister's complete discretion, will determine when that money is to be dispersed. So what will happen is money will be raised – it will be a significant amount of money – and it will go into consolidated revenue. What the bill says is that not that money but an equivalent amount will somehow have to come out, because it does say it must be paid eventually – we do not know when – but it does not say that money will come out and be dispersed to the Hospitals and Charities Fund. It just says it will be deposited into consolidated revenue and then the minister will determine when that money, and in what amounts, will come out.

What that means is – and this is what I predict will happen – the government can raise a lot of money from this premium payment. The contracts awarded to successful licensees in public lotteries and in gaming are significant amounts of money. We are talking many millions of dollars, possibly even hundreds of millions of dollars. This money will go into consolidated revenue. It will prop up the operating result of the government, and the minister, whoever that might be, can discharge the obligation under the bill to make sure that money eventually goes to the Hospitals and Charities Fund but do so in whatever way and according to whatever timetable the government might want. That money can sit there forever until the minister decides to pay it out. Whilst I think we all agree that the Hospitals and Charities Fund is a fund which we do want to see replenished in a substantial fashion

over time so it can meet the needs of assisting people who are suffering or at risk of suffering from gambling harm, whether directly or indirectly, this bill does not guarantee that. This bill depicts it as a possible pathway for that money, and we hope and trust that it will be, but there is no guarantee that it will. That factor alone raises concerns for us that this is what others have described – and what I am happy to describe as well – as a bit of a tax grab. If the government wanted to be clearer and assuage any concerns to the contrary, the government could have easily stipulated in the bill that the money would go directly, or at the first opportunity, from consolidated revenue into the Hospitals and Charities Fund – but it does not do that.

The other transparency and integrity piece that I am concerned about involves the minister's discretion – complete discretion, it seems, beyond scrutiny and beyond fair interrogation by this chamber or any of the committees of this Parliament – to determine the term or the annual payments, if any, that a successful licensee is to pay. Given the significance of these contracts and given the sensitivities and concerns that we all have about this industry and its impact on the community, particularly the most vulnerable, is it a good example of policy and a good example of governance that we have a minister who has the power to determine (1) the quantum of the tax, (2) if and when that tax will be paid and (3) what the duration of the premium payment is? These are very significant matters for a minister to determine. Even if you are happy with the idea of that power being reposed in the minister, isn't it reasonable to at least expect that there will be an ability to properly interrogate that, subject to all the commercial-in-confidence considerations that are fair and reasonable over time? I just do not think giving a minister complete power to determine what a tax is, which is very unusual in terms of legislative policy, and then shielding from fair and proper scrutiny the determination of these very important matters is a good example of policy.

It is for these reasons and others that have been voiced by my colleagues on this side of the house that we oppose this bill, but we do hope that if and when money is to be raised from this new tax, it does actually make its way to those who need it.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:54): I rise to speak also on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and follow the considered contribution of the member for Hawthorn and those from across the house who have spoken on this bill. I particularly acknowledge the member for Eureka for her incredibly powerful contribution born of lived experience.

This is an important bill because it does seek to ensure that the public in the state of Victoria can extract value from licences that apply to the operation of gambling enterprises in Victoria whilst simultaneously reducing the administrative burden associated with that licensing process. I thank the minister in the other place for the work that he and his team have conducted and indeed the Minister for Ports and Freight at the table, his predecessor in that role, who I know is both a font of wisdom on these matters and has worked incredibly hard to lead this government's response to issues in the gaming and casino sector over a number of years and to ensure that we are taking action to minimise gambling harm.

It has been an interesting debate, with the lead opposition speaker, the member for Ovens Valley, commencing his contribution by suggesting that those on this side would simply be speaking from talking points. Now, it is interesting, I think, that false assertion, because listening to the contributions of those opposite, including the member for Hawthorn – who was talking in effect about the incidence of these licence fees and whether that is on the EGM licence holder, on the manufacturers or indeed on those who use them – as well as others who have talked about the lottery licence dimensions, it seems like we have speakers on this side of the house talking about the importance of the public good and of, as the preamble to the bill sets out, the need for the state to be able to extract value from these licences, whereas the contributions from those on the other side have really been about ensuring that the licensee's value is maximised.

In talking about the lottery licence dimensions in particular, we have a question about the public good and the need to maximise public revenue from the issuance of a licence to in effect operate a monopoly.

If you do not have an effective system of licensing that seeks to maximise the public good, that money does not somehow accrue to the sellers of lottery tickets in Mildura, as the member for Mildura said. No, that money – that revenue, that increased proportion of revenue that would accrue to the licence-holder – would simply flow through to the coffers of Tabcorp via the monopolistic entity that runs Australian lotteries, which is the Lott, and in Victoria that is Tatts, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Tabcorp, now based in Brisbane.

It is interesting because other states sometimes suggest that the AFL runs this state, which is obviously a complete furphy. Yet we have here those opposite appearing to be taking their talking points from Tabcorp. Who is the current CEO of Tabcorp? It is Gill McLachlan, who has recently washed up there after a very extended period of time running the AFL. I am finding it slightly discombobulating to have those on our side of the house talking about the need to maximise the public good while simultaneously minimising harm as a consequence of gambling and the need to make sure that in the licensing of a monopolistic lottery we are ensuring that revenue accrues to the people of Victoria, not to Tabcorp, but those on the other side taking the directly contrary perspective. ‘No,’ they are saying, ‘we shouldn’t have an effective form of regulation of lotteries. We shouldn’t be able to give the minister the capacity to extend the term of a public lottery licence or to determine the term of any future public lottery licence if that is in the best interest of Victoria and Victorians. No, we should be making it easier for licence-holders to operate at the expense of Victoria and Victorians and instead be maximising the flow of cash out of the pockets of those who buy lottery tickets to Tabcorp and its shareholders.’ It is a very odd proposition that those opposite are putting forward when they are opposing this bill. It is not mum-and-dad newsagents who would benefit if there were no taxes and no changes, it would be a monopolistic gambling licensee. As I said, at this time in Victoria it is of course Tatts, a subsidiary of Tabcorp.

One of the options to extract value from public lotteries is to explore a long-term extension of the current licence, and that is based upon the experience in other Australian jurisdictions where longer term public lottery licences or extensions have been found to generate considerably greater value for that state, for their citizens and ultimately for taxpayers. This is a form of revenue that then diminishes the burden that is placed upon the taxpayers of Victoria, because this is collected from the licensees of the lottery. The public lottery market in Australia is, as I said, largely a monopoly conducted under the subsidiaries of the Lottery Corporation, which trades as the Lott, and in Victoria that has been Tatts since 1954.

Other jurisdictions around the world have a system for licensing and enabling public lotteries to take place, and like Victoria, where the revenue from that system accrues in a hypothecated way to the Hospitals and Charities Fund, that is also the case in other jurisdictions.

In the UK in the late 1990s, I think, the National Lottery was brought into being, and it had a single licensee, a monopolistic licensee, in the form of Camelot, which made money by clipping the ticket in an almost literal sense from every lottery ticket sold. But the way in which value accrued to the public through that scheme was by the revenue that was generated by the sales of lottery tickets accruing to the public lottery fund, which has funded billions of pounds worth of infrastructure for the public good – the rebuilding of Wembley Stadium and national heritage buildings all over the country being maintained and enhanced. In our state we have also chosen to hypothecate that revenue but for the charities and hospitals fund. It is entirely reasonable that the government would be able to require a premium payment for the monitoring of the licence and the public lottery licence, because it ensures that public licence-holders contribute fairly to the public good.

The member for Hawthorn talked about this being a complex area of public policy, where gambling is of course a legitimate activity but one that we know does have significant negative externalities in the form of problem gambling. Of course not everybody who gambles is a problem gambler or develops habits which are problematic, but far too many historically have. The Productivity Commission undertook a very extensive report into gambling in the last decade, which found that adult prevalence rates for problem gambling were between 0.7 per cent and 1.7 per cent, so

proportionately relatively small but an absolute number that is very significant given the number of Australians who gamble and given the scale of the harm that each individual problem gambler suffers – not just them but those around them: their families, as those in this house have so eloquently spoken about; their communities; and their workplaces, given what we know about the incidence of very sadly theft and the losses that accrue and the impacts that has at a household level in terms of domestic violence, homelessness and so many other challenges. So it is a complex area of policy, but it is important to make sure that the public good to the greatest extent is maximised. One of the ways of doing that is through expanding the minister's powers to be able to maximise the public good and revenue that accrues to the public through changes to the terms of licences.

Now, just speaking briefly about lotteries as a form of revenue raising, economists love lotteries because they see them as a way of enabling the public to effectively voluntarily contribute to the revenue base of a society. There are some economists who would prefer to dispense entirely with the tax system and instead have a form of lottery to raise revenue, perceiving that it would simultaneously overcome free-rider problems but also improve social efficiency and public-good provision by effectively increasing the utility that accrues to somebody buying a lottery ticket. Now, I am certainly not proposing that – I think it is an idea that should exist only in the abstract – but what it does point to is that no-one is compelled to take part in a lottery; lotteries are a mechanism that do, for people who seek to take part in them, offer a form of utility. They might win the prize, ultimately; most of course do not, but their lottery tickets still create a public good if the licensing system is appropriate. That is why I believe this is a good bill, and I commend it to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (17:04): I rise to make a contribution on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I have listened to quite a bit of the debate this afternoon, and I am quite puzzled by some of the arguments put across from the other side about their support for this particular legislation, not least the previous speaker before me who, as I would understand listening to his contribution, effectively wants to take over and socialise all the lotteries in Victoria or Australia on behalf of government. Somehow there is this amorphous good about lotteries –

Iwan Walters: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it is out of order to mislead the house. There was no such word uttered.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): There is no point of order.

Peter WALSH: All I can talk about is what I have heard the member say, and that is how I interpreted what the member was saying. If he did not say that, he should have been more explicit in how he put his case forward.

The other comment I would make is on the member for Narre Warren South, who made the comment about the dodgy practices in the gaming industry. Can I on behalf of the pubs and clubs in my electorate, but particularly the clubs, put on the record that I am supportive of those clubs. The Swan Hill Club, the Swan Hill RSL, the Sporties club in Kerang, the workers club in Echuca and the Ky club are community clubs. They are clubs that deliver community services. Yes, they have poker machines. Yes, people gamble there. Yes, there are a minority of people who have problem gambling issues. But those clubs deliver a meeting place and a service to the community. Those on the other side want to demonise those clubs, and I find that offensive on behalf of those clubs, on behalf of the members of those clubs and on behalf of the patrons of those particular clubs. They are delivering a community service that people require to go and enjoy the hospitality, to enjoy a meal and to enjoy a drink, if they choose to consume alcohol, and some people go and play the pokies. The majority do not go anywhere near the pokies.

Can I thank particularly the Swan Hill Club, the Swan Hill RSL club and the Ky club, who actually donated money over the last two years – and hopefully ongoing will donate money – to our Kokoda scholarship program, so in our case the Colin Sinclair Scholarships. We are fortunate enough that we are sending five year 11 students to walk Kokoda this July with a group of us. I know those clubs have

to put a certain amount of their money into the community good, but in this case they have chosen to support year 11 students to go and walk Kokoda, learn the history and walk in the footsteps of heroes, as it is said – the people that defended this great nation back in the Second World War against Japanese invasion. I have found it offensive, listening to those on the other side that want to constantly demonise those clubs that are in our electorates, and I am sure there are suburban clubs that are equally important to community as the country clubs that we have there.

For those on the other side who have said, ‘This is not a tax because it’s being hypothecated to a particular purpose,’ it is still a tax and it is still mentioned as a tax in the second-reading speech. I think, again, to have the Treasurer say there are no new taxes in the budget but to have legislation last week that introduced the biggest land tax ever – it is not an emergency services tax; it is a land tax on land in Victoria. This government is addicted to taxing anyone that owns anything. If you own something in your own name, this government will find a way of taxing it, and that is what they have done with the emergency services tax. Particularly the agriculture sector but every single person that has a house in Victoria will pay more under this particular tax.

Again, I find it offensive that the Treasurer would say, ‘There are no new taxes in the budget.’ Maybe they are not listed by that word in the budget, but the income from them is listed in the budget. The income from the emergency services tax is in the budget. That is how we have actually got a cash surplus in the budget at the moment. Irrespective of how much the debt is continuing to increase all the time, there is a surplus in the budget because of that emergency services tax.

It was very, very clear as to why the upper house sat till 1:30 or 2 o’clock while all of us sat here waiting for the legislation to come back – because the government and the Treasurer needed that legislation through last week so it could be in the budget papers and so it could be in the bottom line that we have a cash surplus at the moment. That money is not being put into the emergency services. That is why there were 5000 or 6000 people on the front steps this morning, because they find it offensive that they are being used as an excuse for a new land tax in Victoria that is effectively there to prop up the bottom line and fund the bureaucracy, which should be funded out of consolidated revenue. It is a fact that we are going to have Triple Zero Victoria, we are going to have Emergency Management Victoria and we are going to have all the bureaucrats funded out of this. As I said in the previous contribution on that legislation, do not ever stand between a department secretary and a bucket of money. There is now that bucket of money there, and there will be department secretaries crawling over the top of each other to get access to those billions of dollars. So it is a tax. Yes, this money is hypothecated to the Hospitals and Charities Fund, but it is mentioned as a tax. Yes, it will probably do good there, but it is still a tax. It is another tax on Victorians into the future.

I also find the issue is that, with a number of pieces of legislation we have dealt with in the last few years, the government has homed in on regulating poker machines. They are something they can regulate and they can tax. If you think about the future generation of gamblers and what is happening with the gaming industry, the younger generation gamble online. I have met with the clubs, particularly the clubs on the Victorian side of the border but also the clubs on the New South Wales side of the border. Having a cross-border community, we have large clubs on the other side of the river that developed over the time when there were no poker machines in Victoria. We have got large clubs on the other side of the river, and they are making plans for the future, when effectively the number of people that play poker machines and the amount of money that goes through poker machines will gradually decline. If you go into one of the clubs or pubs and look at the age of the people that are playing poker machines, most of those people will not be playing poker machines in 10 or 15 years time. The younger generation is actually gambling online. Whether you want a Sportsbet account or whatever account you want, you can do all the horse races online. You can bet on all the football games online. You can bet on almost anything online on your mobile phone, and that cannot be regulated or taxed by the Victorian government.

So I find it, again, interesting that they are so fixated on poker machines. No-one is arguing that there are not people that have gambling problems with poker machines, but there are a lot more people that

I would say have gambling problems with forms of gambling other than poker machines. What is the government doing about all those out there that have an addiction to horse racing on their mobile phone? All those out there that are washing out bets and making bets as the football is being played are equally at risk of gambling problems. So I put the challenge to the government: what are you going to do about those things that you cannot tax and regulate to try and solve the issues around problem gambling? Because it is there, but it is a generational thing. As I said, the clubs and pubs that I talk to are making longer term plans for their revenue to be declining out of poker machines because of increased regulation but also because of the generational change in how people gamble.

The last thing I just want to touch on is that by charging the clubs for the cost of the monitor there is a very real risk that that will punish the smaller clubs rather than the larger clubs, and all the clubs that I mentioned before that are in my electorate are very much in the smaller club category if you think about the size of clubs right across Victoria. They deliver a service to those communities. They meet a community need by running a club for the people that do not want to go to the bars in hotels. They have an option in the towns where there are these clubs to go somewhere else for a meal, to take their family for a meal and to hold their family functions if they want to do that. I am concerned that the tax for having a monitor will disproportionately affect those smaller clubs, and I think that will be to the detriment of the communities in my electorate and probably in most of the other electorates across country Victoria. So as the lead speaker, the member for Ovens Valley, said, we will be opposing this legislation for all the reasons that he set out.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (17:13): As I rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 I would like to speak about song sheets. It has become very apparent while listening to the contributions of those opposite that there are two important points here: (1) they are singing from the usual song sheet, and (2) there is a way that they have radically departed from their usual song sheet. Let me start with how they are singing from the usual song sheet. Earlier I and others involved in the government business program debate were accused of being handed notes and reading from a speech prepared for us, which was quite offensive. But those opposite seem to all be singing from the same song sheet, and that is the usual fear campaign based on misinformation. That is a song sheet that is creased, it is smudged and it has got their fingerprints all over it, because they go over that song over and over and over again.

How about some facts for their fear campaign and for their misinformation? It seems that a lot of those opposite have not actually read the bill, because it has become quite apparent that they are misunderstanding in fact how many licences there are.

They seem to think that there are monitoring licences for all venues or everybody has got to pay a premium. They do not seem to recognise, or to have read and understood, that we are talking about a monitoring licence – likely to be a monitoring licence for one provider. When they talk about their local clubs and venues, all they are doing is seeking to raise fear in their home communities about the implications of this bill. A fear campaign – nothing new from those opposite. They are taking the facts and turning them to put fear into people. We have heard from members opposite that they are having straitened financial times. And that is when you would seek to promote fear for them, for their business model and for their costs? What sort of member does that? That is not fair. That is not right. That is just a fear campaign.

Understanding that local venues are not paying the premium is an important fact that I would like to stay out there. In fact as part of that determination of who is granted that licence the minister will assess how they are seeking to set fair costs for venue operators and how those costs for the venue operators will be maintained and not unfairly raised by the licence-holder. Not only is our minister seeking to ensure that there are fair costs for the venue operators but they are seeking to ensure that costs do not increase for the venue operators. It is the very opposite of what members opposite are saying. We are seeking to support and value the venue operators through building in ways to help them continue to contribute to their local communities as they go about their business.

Where I want to say that they are not singing from the usual song sheet, where they have departed radically from what they are usually saying in this place, is that suddenly they want to give things away for free. Suddenly they do not want to have any value attached to a state asset. Suddenly it seems they are not interested in the market approach for determining the value of an asset.

A member interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: They are socialising the asset; that is right. It must be very uncomfortable; they have to bend and twist and contort themselves into new ideologies that they are probably not quite used to in order to promote that fear campaign.

What we have in this bill is that the determination for who will be granted the licence is a market approach. We are maximising value for the state by looking at the different offers that come forward, by looking at, like I said, what they will propose to charge to venue operators and looking at how they will be able to implement some of the gambling harm reduction reforms that we have introduced and build flexibility into their systems and their capability to be able to respond to future initiatives by this government. Having multiple people apply for that monitoring licence determines the best value for money in terms of also looking at the length of the licence and the like. That abandonment of their usual approach surprises me, especially when we look at the lotto licence.

I have some authority to speak on this because I am a newsagent's daughter and my first job was in a newsagency. I spent many, many years at the knees of my parents seeing lottery tickets being bought and being sold. We heard from the member for Mildura about newsagents that are closing due to dwindling business et cetera, and that is true. The Lottery Corporation does no favours for newsagents. I saw that with my parents, and I know that from other newsagent families that we associated with. They are not there as loving benefactors for newsagents. They have a business model: the newsagent pays, and that is how it works.

So wanting to give it away for free – wanting to give an extension of the lotto licence for free, giving away a state asset for free – really does not make sense at all. Giving it away for free when actually we would like the corporation that is benefiting from that, that is making a profit from our asset – of course they should pay. And how fantastic that the funds then are hypothecated, as we have heard, into the Hospitals and Charities Fund.

On the Hospitals and Charities Fund, I heard some magical thinking that is not actually new to me. We heard the member for Hawthorn talking about the funds that are being paid by the licensee. He was concerned it was not that money but an equivalent amount of money. When I worked for a charity I had that same experience – of standing in a remote Indonesian village looking at a pen of goats with another donor, from America, and we both contributed to the same program. And the donor from America said, 'So which goats are our goats?' When the money goes into the bucket, it stops belonging to a particular person. One \$5 note cannot be, you know, stamped as coming from a particular place – it is worked out in a much more sophisticated way than that.

But what really displeased me and was something I was quite surprised to hear ventilated this afternoon was the tentative statement from the member for Mildura, which she sort of rolled around in her mouth – and she seemed to like the sound of it, because then she repeated it with a strengthened tone. 'Well, there might be dodgy charities,' she said. 'We're putting this money into the Hospitals and Charities Fund, but there might be dodgy charities.' How offensive. How offensive to those charities, to the workers at those charities – the people who have chosen to dedicate their lives to serving others – and to no doubt the countless volunteers that work for those charities. To cast aspersions on charities generally and because we are speaking about specific charities that are funded through this Hospitals and Charities Fund is quite low. It is quite low to seek to make out that they are somehow grubby or they might not be good charities. That is sad.

So as I said, it is the usual song sheet from those opposite – a fear campaign based on disinformation – while at the same time they are doing a double pike and completely abandoning their free-market

ideology. Wow, what a combo. I was not expecting that on budget day. But what I do expect and what I am glad to see is a Labor government that continues to deliver gambling reform for Victorians to seek to reduce harm and to make sure that the state and all of its fantastic inhabitants continue to benefit from assets that belong rightly to the state. I commend this bill to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (17:23): I rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. On the day that we have volunteer firefighters, farmers, businesses, shop owners, householders and renters all out in front of the Parliament protesting in their thousands about the new emergency services tax that the government, this Allan Labor government, are imposing on all Victorians – on the very day they are out there protesting and the day after our Treasurer said that there would be no more taxes – here we are in the Parliament introducing, through this gambling legislation, a new tax. Now, the members on the other side have tried to carry on about the fact that that is not the case, yet in this bill, the gambling legislation bill, clause 7, which is on page 4 – so you do not have to read too far into the bill to come across it – actually says:

The premium payment ... is a tax.

The premium payment is a tax – black and white.

This is a bill that contains several main provisions and several minor provisions that can be classified as legislative housekeeping, but the main provision revolves predominantly around changes to the gaming monitoring licence. Effectively the government are using this opportunity that presents to them at the end of the contract, the 15-year contract that the current licence-holder Intralot has, to put out to tender the licence, and have added in this opportunity the provision for a premium payment, which is the name for the new tax, as described, as I have said, in clause 7 on page 2. You do not have to read too far into it to see the word quite clearly in black and white: tax.

So this is a tax that is going to be placed on poker machines. Now, there has always been monitoring on poker machines through this Intralot licence that has invested in the technologies to monitor the poker machines. But this new premium payment aspect will be imposed on the new successful tender business, whoever that is, in 2027. They will also be introducing another new tax on the lottery players, and that is because that has never happened before. So it is nothing more than a tax grab.

It will go into consolidated revenue and it will be at the government's discretion. We do not know whether it will be up-front. We do not know whether it will be over the course of the licence. That is yet to be disclosed by the government, and we see this from Labor time and time again, that they do not actually give you the details of the legislation. They wait and say, 'We will put it in regulations.' That is their way of being sneaky, lacking transparency and using this opportunity to reach into the pockets of hardworking Victorians and find every possible way to find more money because of their mismanagement of the budget over 10 years. So we will see another tax.

This is a government that for the last 10 years year on year has blown out the budget due to their cost blowouts on projects by an average of \$14 billion year in, year out. That is why we are seeing that we have now got a state debt higher than any other state in this nation, a debt heading towards \$200 billion. That means every day Victorians will be funding that debt to the value of \$29 million in interest payments. Can you imagine what \$29 million a day in Victoria, which Victorian taxpayers are having to pay to fund the government's mismanagement, would do? How many hospitals could be built? Warrnambool hospital needs an upgrade. It was promised a \$384 million build that would have covered the scope that the government themselves actually stated was needed, and they asked the community in my area to be patient until they got it right. In 2020 we were told \$384 million would be enough to build the hospital that meets the needs of our community. Lo and behold, because of government mismanagement and cost blowouts, that is now \$100 million more, because a 30 per cent increase has occurred on builds in this state. Much of that is because of taxes and mismanagement, but the government have not listed in the budget an increase for Warrnambool hospital so we can get the hospital that the government determined we needed, that they asked our community to be patient about and wait to get it right. They are now saying, 'Sorry, not building it to scope; going to cut it.' That is a

government that you cannot trust and a government that has made error after error in its managing of the budget.

We have now a state that has more taxes than we have ever seen before – 62 new taxes and these two here today, not just one, but two, one on poker machines and the new one on lotteries. If I can just remind Victorians: we have got a vacant home tax; stamp duty on transfers between spouses – that is a tax; the windfall gains tax on rezoned land; a bin tax on our rubbish; a school tax; a tax on students; a patient tax – that is a tax on people who are sick; a holiday and tourism tax; a death tax; and of course the fire services levy tax, for which we saw thousands on the street today just here in front of the Parliament.

I saw the Minhamite truck, the Byaduk truck, the Bessiebelle truck, the Caramut truck –

Sarah Connolly: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member has strayed so far from the bill at hand. Could you draw her back to the bill and what we need to talk about today as being wholly relevant to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): I do note that the debate today has been very wide-ranging. However, I would ask the member for South-West Coast to come back to the bill.

Roma BRITNELL: This is a bill that, in clause 7 on page 2 of the bill, is introducing a new tax. I am referring to tax, which this government has an addiction to. I was referring also to the one of 62 taxes that this government passed last week – a tax on farmers, a tax on households, a tax on renters, a tax on business, a tax on hardworking Victorians – and I was pointing out how just today thousands were on the steps of Parliament while this government pretends this is a tax that is supposed to help volunteers.

Katie Hall: On a point of order on relevance, Acting Speaker, the member has strayed way beyond the gambling bill that we are debating.

Roma BRITNELL: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a bill about a tax. I am speaking about a tax. Everybody has been talking about different taxes that have been introduced by this government, and I am staying very close to the bill –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): Okay. Thank you, member for South-West Coast. I do not uphold that point of order. I will say that I did ask you to come back to the bill, and I do feel you strayed immediately and defied my ruling. Would you please come back to the bill.

Roma BRITNELL: I am discussing the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill, which is actually a bill that introduces a tax, as is said in the bill on page 2, not very far into the bill. I am talking about how this government has been addicted to taxes, greatly insulting the hardworking Victorians, who are absolutely disgusted with the state the government has left our state in. They were on the steps today protesting about this government, who are trying to claim that volunteers are going to be given an advantage from the tax that this government has introduced.

Katie Hall: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on her feet continues to defy your ruling, and I ask that you bring her back – she is like a broken clock over there – to the bill at hand about gambling.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): Member for South-West Coast, you have made your point, I do believe. I would like to ask you to come back to the bill.

Roma BRITNELL: I have 10 minutes and only 10 minutes to make my point about how this government is addicted to taxes, and I will continue to make my relevant point about the taxes this government insults our community with.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:33): I too rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and I intend to speak about the bill and also about gambling addiction here in

this state. The aim of this bill is to build on our government's gambling reforms, with the focus of this piece of legislation being the framework for the gaming machine monitoring licence, as well as our public lottery licences, so that our government has the tools and, importantly, the flexibility it needs to regulate this framework now and into the future.

When it comes to gambling and casino reform in this country, our government, the Allan Labor government, has made leaps and strides in the past couple of years alone. This is not the first piece of legislation this term that deals with gambling legislation, and I imagine before November next year it will not be the last. I note that just earlier this year we debated another gambling bill that implemented several of our key reforms to the pokie sector, including – and I just thought this was so great; my community absolutely loved this – mandatory precommitment and carded play, as well as slower slot machines.

I am going to come very shortly to why this is really important, particularly in my local community. I also acknowledge that these came on top of the changes that came into effect last year surrounding opening times for pokie venues, ensuring that closing times are uniform so that gamers cannot move between venues to avoid a break.

All of these things were key recommendations to go ahead and reduce the impacts of gambling harm in our state. They were things that we did to protect folks here in this state who were unable to act to protect themselves, and this is something I know very well as a western suburbs member of Parliament. The western suburbs take a great deal of seriousness in addressing these kinds of issues. It is our people in the western suburbs that are hurt immensely through gambling addiction. We know what happens when gambling harm gets out of control. There have been amazing speeches here in this place on both sides of the chamber of experiences and of personal experiences – people, including me, also talking about family members that have had gambling addiction that has led to drug and alcohol abuse and family violence. We know that steps need to be taken to address the impact of gambling harm, to keep families from losing money or worse.

In Brimbank, which takes in Sunshine, Albion, Ardeer and Sunshine West in my electorate, gambling losses since July last year – get this; I still cannot believe this – amount to more than \$103 million across those suburbs alone. The City of Wyndham ranks seventh, with \$77 million in gambling losses. It is absolutely a good thing that we are doing everything we can to go ahead and tackle and ensure that our venues in these local communities like mine, where there is significant gambling harm that is caused and happens, are operating in a way that allows for people to game responsibly and minimise harm, because every excess dollar that we do not lose to gambling harm is going back to families and households to spend on essentials, to save for big life goals and dreams or even just to spend on a good night out.

This bill continues the great work to achieve this goal. What this bill does is turns its attention to the gambling machine monitoring licence framework. It is not a massive reform. It is not a change like the previous bills have been, but this is just as important in making sure that those reforms are enforced and complied with as they are intended to be. Currently Intralot Gaming Services have had the licence for operating the electronic monitoring systems on all Victorian pokie machines since 2011; all machines are legally required to be connected to this system in venues. This licence has a 15-year term, and it is set to expire in 2027. As part of this licence, they are also responsible for administering programs such as YourPlay to machines, which serves as our mandatory precommitment scheme. The first important change that this bill makes in respect to this is that it allows for the term of the licence to be specified in the licence agreement, replacing the current year 15 requirement. We are almost at the end of that 15-year period, and this change not only allows for the terms of the licence to continue after this period but allows the government greater control over how long the monitoring licences are granted for and, importantly, the conditions that are attached to them.

Another change in this bill will allow the government to require a premium payment for consideration for the monitoring licence. What that means is that when considering any future monitor for our pokie

machines the licensing framework is going to provide a maximum efficiency for our monitoring licensee, which is now Intralot but could hypothetically not be at some point in the future. What this basically means is that we can go ahead and make the tools we currently have to enforce the gambling industry much more effective and much more efficient at not only doing the jobs that they are doing now but also doing more things as well.

A really good example of this is that the bill will allow for the monitoring licensee to be directed to other private regulator compliance systems and mechanisms, such as those to assist with preventing money laundering through alert systems, so that the venue operators that they oversee are aware of and are complying with their obligations under the legislation and our regulatory frameworks. Under this change, for example, Intralot or a future replacement would be able to run anti-money-laundering system alerts on our slot machines, which is really important. That means they will be able to pick up from machines if something seems dodgy, and they should pick it up pretty quickly, which in turn assists our authorities in tracking illegal activity.

More importantly, the bill is also going to allow for mandatory conditions of the licence agreement, such as the requirement to operate mandatory precommitment and other systems, to be established prior to the licensing agreement being entered into, and that means any gambling provider seeking to be granted a licence by our government will be aware in advance that they will have to include their operating activities under our gambling laws, which is going to mean less time adjusting and adapting to these systems once the licence commences. We know that this will mean greater certainty for the industry, especially our venues, to know that there will be a semblance of continuity in place should the licence change or be renewed.

In addition to all of this, the bill makes similar changes to the framework that governs our public lottery licensing. Here in Victoria this licence currently sits with Tattersall's, who run a number of different lottery competitions that many of us in this house will know, including TattsLotto, Powerball and Oz Lotto. They have been around for some time. The changes to the licensing framework included in this bill include things like empowering the government to issue a long-term extension, which will make this framework consistent with other major gambling licences.

Yes, this bill is quite technical. It does not quite introduce the major reforms of previous gambling-related bills that we have put before this house and debated and, yes, passed, which are now law. But these changes are really important to ensure that the licences that our government issues to these companies – and it is a really big responsibility to operate key sections of our gambling industry – such as the monitoring licence for our poker machines or our lottery licence, are able to function better. Our reforms to the sector, including things like precommitment, do not work if the licensing frameworks that govern them and govern the companies that run these machines are not up to standard and up to what Victorians expect here in this state. That is why these changes not only reflect what we are trying to achieve, which is really important, but also give greater certainty and flexibility to these reforms so they last well after the current licences expire. I think that is really, really important. I am really pleased to see this bill come before the house this evening, and that is exactly why I wholeheartedly commend it to the house.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (17:43): I rise today to oppose the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 because Labor is reducing certainty and transparency around the monitoring licence and hiding a new tax. Yes, you heard it right – another new tax. I oppose this bill because I strongly believe that Victorians are sick of poor government. They are sick of the Allan Labor government not getting it right. They are sick of poor decisions. They are sick of new taxes introduced under the guise of something else. They expect that if we pass an act of Parliament that we pass good legislation, and this is not good legislation as it stands. To be frank, what I find absolutely extraordinary and disturbing is that this is yet another tax. This attitude of 'She'll be right. Let's just rush it through. It's good enough' and adding more taxes in whatever way, shape or form they are hidden and disguised is a cost to Victorians. The constituents of Pahran are clever and are engaged, and I would do them no justice by supporting this bill.

It is a new tax to clubs, pubs and lottery outlets. We have seen the most extraordinary crowds on the steps of Parliament House today protesting against the emergency services tax. Victorians are hurting like never before, and what do we see now? Yes, it is another tax. Call it a premium payment, but it is a tax. This bill is focused not on harm minimisation, which it should be, but on another tax grab. We have even heard that the taxes raised will go to the children's hospital fund. That too is vital, but with Labor's mismanagement of funds, where is this money going? Which one is it: is it harm minimisation, is it the children's hospital fund? The member for Eureka said that this will go to the children's hospital fund, but the legislation states it is hospitals and charities that it is going to go to. So I want to be clear: it is a tax to pay for another area of government that Labor cannot afford. Yes, the member for Eureka outlined how important harm minimisation is in gambling, but the taxes raised are not going to that. I have got grave concerns about which possible charities it actually will go to, because it is not outlined. Victorians deserve to know exactly where this money will go, and we have absolutely no clarity.

The industry has not asked for this amendment, and I am concerned about the wasted resources put into this bill. The bill makes some changes to the issuing of monitoring licences for gaming machines in Victoria and in relation to public lotteries. It also makes other minor changes to gambling regulation in Victoria. In terms of monitoring licences, all gaming machines in Victorian clubs and pubs must be connected to an electronic monitoring system to ensure the integrity of the machines and to provide data and information on gaming machines for regulatory, research and other purposes. In Victoria the electronic monitoring system is operated by Intralot Gaming Services Pty Ltd, and Intralot's licence commenced in August 2012 for a 15-year period, and it expires on 15 August 2027. There is now no recommendation on the new licence period, and it leaves the operator in the dark. It impacts a competitive tendering process and deters them from wanting to invest in a system for the future. This is not good business practice. As part of its licence requirements, Intralot also runs YourPlay, which is Victoria's pre-eminent scheme. It is a harm reduction scheme that allows players to set limits on the time or money spent and to keep track of their gaming across Victoria. Well, I agree harm minimisation is vital. Encouragement of licence-holders to invest in a support harm minimisation system is also important in my view. This bill removes the 15-year term for a licence and replaces it with a term that can be set by the minister. It also introduces the requirement for the monitoring licensee to pay a fee of one or more amounts for the licence. The premium will be set by the minister and can be an up-front fee or an annual payment during the term of the licence. This new fee or premium is yet another tax grab for the government, and we do not even know what the fee will be before we vote on this legislation. This is really poor legislation, and my constituents would be disgusted if I supported bills that had no clarity.

This new tax on whoever wins the monitoring licence from 2027 onwards will inevitably be passed on by the operator to each and every club and hotel in Victoria that operates gaming machines. It is a tax on venues in every suburb and in every town across the state. These clubs and pubs are already doing it tough having to pay for Labor's ever-increasing taxes: land tax, payroll tax, the emergency services tax. Now they have got to pay for Labor's new gambling tax as well. This tax grab will mean less money for local clubs to distribute to grassroots sporting clubs and community groups across the state. And let us be frank: these venue operators do support our local clubs. We have already heard it in the chamber today. By hitting at the profitability of local clubs and hotels, there will also be a negative impact on employment, especially in regional areas, where clubs are the beating heart of their local communities.

The changes to legislation introducing a new tax after the EOI process was completed will also further erode business confidence in this government and in our state. This is something that screams sovereign risk to me, and it is something at a time when business groups are telling us how tough it is to do business in this state and when credit rating agencies are considering downgrading Victoria's credit rating. Adding more taxes and moving the goalposts halfway through a process will only make things worse.

In regard to changes to Crown's voluntary exclusion program the bill makes minor changes to remove red tape and makes it easier for people to voluntarily exclude themselves from Crown Casino. That is a good thing. This is welcome because someone putting their hand up and saying they have had enough is the first step to getting the help and treatment that they need. Putting up unnecessary barriers like requiring a statutory declaration to self-exclude, in my view, is counter-productive and may actively discourage some people from saying they have had enough and seeking help, and that is not what we want to see. But perhaps more can be done in this space. Rather than just allowing people to self-exclude for a while until they want to come back for more, perhaps we should be considering whether they have attended treatment programs before they can decide to return to Crown Casino.

The minister claims that the addition of a premium payment will extract better value for the monitoring licence; that is in the second-reading speech. However, it is clearly defined in clause 7 of the bill, as my colleagues have said, as a new tax. The government refused to rule out any passing on of costs from the successful applicant, meaning that small clubs and venues are concerned that they will be paying even more for monitoring in the coming years, potentially putting their bottom line at risk. This will hit smaller clubs who are already running on small margins and are unable to absorb many costs without putting up prices. The Liberals are not opposed to opportunities to improve harm minimisation, but do not hide a tax in this legislation and treat us like fools and say it is all about harm minimisation, because it is not. This bill is a tax. It is a gambling tax that is not even specifically directed to harm minimisation. It is directed at the Treasurer's discretion at a time of the Treasurer's choosing. Further, the changes to the licence terms to be defined by the minister lead to more uncertainty and reduce the competitive process of companies applying for the licence. A short licence period of only five years will not be interesting to companies as the cost of investment versus the security of the licence just simply will not add up.

Clubs continually give back to their local communities across Victoria as entertainment venues, as places for family gatherings and as food and beverage outlets. They employ Victorians. We are simply not providing a transparent bill that is sensible, and the intention just simply is not clear. It has missed the mark on licensing and good business governance. It is common sense to consider that anyone wanting to invest in business ventures would want clarity on the length of their licence and the associated costs. Further, it is also common sense to suggest that any tax imposed on Victorians would mean that Victorians would want to know where it is going. The bill provides a very loose explanation: hospitals and charity funds at the Treasurer's discretion.

The member for Albert Park finds it odd that we would raise this, but with Labor's mismanagement of Victoria's finances, I think it is absolutely appropriate to call them out on this new tax – that it is not going towards gambling-related services but into a generic charity fund. Members on the opposite side of the chamber talk about harm minimisation and how good this bill is. The bill is predominantly about a new tax with some reasonable amendments, but it is littered with problems. We will be opposing this bill and seeking amendments.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (17:53): It is an important bill that we are rising for today, and I just want to take up the member for Warrandyte on a couple of points. Within the member for Warrandyte's community there is only one pokies venue, and that pokies venue, from my understanding, is the Club Ringwood. The community benefits scheme provides a tax break from every Victorian – every Victorian funds clubs across the community through our general revenue and taxation by giving a tax discount. The member for Warrandyte would be sad to hear that just 10 per cent of the community benefits that accrue at this club, which claims \$1.9 million in community benefits, go to genuine community benefits. When we are talking about genuine community benefits, we are talking about the dollars that go to schools to provide awards – you know, if we think about the RSLs, that is an important one that they do for Kokoda – or for other such services. I hope she takes to task the Club Ringwood in that conversation that she has, because it is important that they should be contributing the same way that Victorians contribute to them.

The member for Murray Plains talked of the paragons of the community and the contributions that the clubs make in the community that he represents, and I will take him up on Swan Hill Club here in particular. The community benefit scheme, which provides a 6.5 per cent tax decrease for gaming venues – that is a discount from every Victorian – claim \$61,000 in community benefits. That is \$1.6 million that they actually claim overall in community benefits, and what is that \$1.6 million actually spent on, as opposed to the money that is real and genuine charity work? They spent \$340 on a donation to Challenge cancer in 2024, and that is quite a good thing. Unfortunately, that is dwarfed by the \$150,000 that they pay in management fees to themselves, and they claim that those management fees are a community benefit, which is surprising to me.

They are pretty happy people down at the Swan Hill Club, because they claim that a community benefit is the \$198,000 in costs of goods sold from the bar. So when you go down to the club there in Swan Hill and you buy yourself a beer, that beer is being claimed as a community benefit on the taxpayers purse. That is us copping that. That is them getting the discount. It is absolutely outrageous. The food that you buy is being claimed as a community benefit, not the cost of doing ordinary business running a club. That is fine if they want to run a club, but do not pretend these things are community benefits. Superannuation, which they are required to pay by law, is supposedly a community benefit. The electricity and gas – well, the members of the Swan Hill Club would be probably quite disgusted if there was no heating or cooling on. They could not see at night what they were eating in front of them. They could not pay with EFTPOS because all the electricity was shut down. But no, that is not a club benefit, it is a community benefit.

The land tax – that is an interesting one – is also a community benefit, I am told. Well, it is a state benefit; of course it is a state benefit. Security patrols for the venue – community benefits again. It is just amazing the amount of goodwill that the Swan Hill Club has for the community in taking discounts from state taxpayers and getting those discounts from state taxpayers.

I could go on with each of the venues across the community that the member for Murray Plains represents. But I thought there were some interesting ones here. We have talked a lot about the Country Fire Authority today, and it is great to see that the Echuca Workers & Services Club donated \$200 to the Country Fire Authority. That should be applauded of course. They should continue to do so. They probably should do so somewhere near the \$1.663 million that they claim in community benefits and get handsomely rewarded for by the state with a tax discount. But in fact they could only find the time to dip so slightly into their pockets to find \$200. I wonder if the members opposite will actually speak to their clubs locally, engage them and encourage them to donate to those charitable efforts that those in the community do and that these clubs claim from the taxpayers. I should mention on the way through that they spend seven times as much plus on photocopying. The value of their photocopying is seven and a half times the value of that of their local CFA. The priorities are wrong. They spend on advertising \$17,000 on TV, \$200 on their local CFA, \$5,000 on newspapers, \$200 on the CFA, \$14,000 on radio, \$200 on the CFA and 10 times as much on advertising brochures. If we are talking about the wonderful community benefits of pokies venues across our state, I am yet to read it when they send this required work back into the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission.

I know that the minister in the other place has mentioned that he is looking at the community benefit scheme. We should not look at it, we should end it. We should end it so those moneys come back into the state and are provided to taxpayers to be spent in the interests of Victorians.

We know that experiencing harm from gambling is up, even though the number of players on pokies is down. We know that there is a big transition in gambling that is happening at the moment. We know those who use the pokies – 29 per cent – are three in 10 people. So when you go to a venue, three in 10 people are experiencing some form of harm. Precommitment has been called for for over a decade – in fact a decade and a half. I am so proud to be part of a government that is starting to implement this. It has been implemented at Crown and been implemented across the state.

We have done a number of reforms. We have increased the spin rates by 40 per cent from 2.14 seconds. That was put into this Parliament last year. We have increased some of those reforms around integrity. We know there were some real challenges, and those challenges were outlined in the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence in 2021. All 33 of those recommendations have been ticked off by this government. Now \$2000 payouts must include ID for those people who are using pokies venues.

We know that there is more than \$7 billion in gambling harm annually, and the losses at pokies made up \$4 billion of that in 2023–24. In December this year, precommitment will be down to \$100 from \$1000. I think one of the most important reforms that we have done on pokies is closing venues uniformly from 4 am to 10 am. That came into effect on 30 August 2024. The reason we did that is because pokies venues were shipping people by bus from pokies venue to pokies venue, a shocking thing to do to people who are experiencing harm. That is what was happening to people who were at pokies venues from 4 am to 10 am.

On online gambling: under the leadership of the member for Laverton we did a review through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee into pokies harm last year. They were just shocking, some of the experiences of young people in particular – young people who were gambling well before they were 18 because the industry do not take as much care as they should. One of the young people said that the biggest thing that they lost was not the dollars – they have a lifetime of earning ahead of them – but time. It was time to establish their relationships with other people. It was time to establish their friendships. It was time to build their family. It was time to establish their life in the workforce. They lost time, and they will never get that back because of this industry. So of course we should have bills like this inside the house. Of course we should extract the maximum amount of money possible from a gambling industry that by its own admission shows so little care for the community across Victoria and that gains so much for itself.

I do commend this bill to the house, and I do hope for its speedy passage. I condemn the opposition for opposing this bill and for not taking that care when in government to make these changes.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (18:03): I rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and I will begin by commending the member for Point Cook for his exposé of what sounds like borderline fraudulent use of the community benefits classification. I look forward to a subsequent speech at some stage about how it has all been stopped. For the most part, however, this bill is necessary enabling legislation for the wider reforms of precommitment and carded play that will reduce gambling harm. To that end, I note that the companion bill, the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024 was introduced by the previous minister in November last year. It was debated and passed by this house in March and is now awaiting debate in the Legislative Council, and we encourage the new minister to bring that bill forward to the other place without further delay.

As we wait, we see yet again record losses by Victorians through poker machines. We are now up to an annual record. As a state we have now tipped over the \$3 billion mark. In the most recent data reported by the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, Victorians lost \$3.03 billion in the last year, or more accurately \$3.03 billion was extracted from communities across Victoria by machines that are specifically designed for addiction by an industry that is raking in record profits by supporting that harm.

Sadly, we also see the national trend of gambling losses and devastated lives continuing to climb. Australians continue to be the world's biggest per capita losers on gambling, and as we all know, the individual stories of harm, grief and lives lost that are hidden in those statistics are heartbreaking and preventable.

The excellent work done by the late Peta Murphy MP, a friend and respected federal colleague of some in this chamber, delivered the *You Win Some, You Lose More* inquiry report into online gambling

and its effects on those experiencing gambling harm in June 2023, basically two years ago. The community has found the lack of action by federal Parliament profoundly disappointing, and we encourage the new minister to bring forward those federal reforms. Given that the federal government is dragging its feet on vital reform, Victoria needs to step up to protect our communities.

While we are discussing local gambling harm, I wish to raise an issue that I am aware is current in my electorate of Brunswick – actually raised just yesterday by a constituent – which I am sure is playing out in other communities across Victoria, and that is the issue of local venues that want to get rid of their poker machines. Those venues want to be sure that the entitlements will not be reissued. What is the point if poker machines just pop up in another venue, continuing to harm people? That just shifts the problem to another location. We are interested in policy reforms which support communities to get rid of gambling machines as opposed to simply moving them from venue to venue, and we urge the minister to engage with local venues and remove barriers to making this happen. This would include allowing venues to break their licence contracts if they want to get rid of their pokies. The government should not force businesses to continue profiting from addiction. We need to be taking action to reduce the impact of gambling harm across our communities.

The Greens will be supporting today's bill to send it to the upper house, and we urge the government to continue to advance their announced gambling reforms with alacrity to stop the terrible losses Victorian communities continue to suffer, which we know go so far beyond the financial.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (18:07): I rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The bill will amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991. I would like to thank the member for Brunswick for his short and succinct words and thoughts, and I would certainly concur, and also the member for Point Cook, who spoke very eloquently and brought it back to what this debate really is, which is not about a lot of the stuff that has been talked about but is about people and the damage.

I must be feeling a bit sick, which I am, but I am going to thank the member for Hawthorn for his opening remarks – that got your attention, didn't it? – because up until he criticised the member for Frankston, his opening remarks reminded me that there are pubs, clubs and RSLs around Australia that do some great work. They are great places for the community to meet and have great social activities, but also and importantly they employ a lot of locals, a lot of members of their communities. It was good to be reminded of that, because this is the fourth gambling bill that has come to the house, and when I go back and look at it I see I can get a bit negative about pokies and clubs and the damage they cause, but it is also good to remember the other side of it – that there are some positives to the clubs, and certainly the member for Murray Plains felt the need to talk about his clubs in that sense. I do not get up here today and assume that any owner or manager of any club whatsoever that has pokies is doing the wrong thing, but we have needed the four bills that we have been debating, this one being the fourth, because there are people that have lost their livelihoods, lost their houses, lost their marriages, lost all hope, because there have been people and clubs in the past that have preyed on them so that they can get the profits that they needed or wanted and they were not so concerned about the harm that it did to people that were addicts.

This is one of the other things: throughout the four times we have debated the gambling legislation, often people have got up and talked about people with a gambling problem, and I know this drives gambling addicts mad. I think people with a gambling problem probably know they have got a bit of a problem and they can go and have a bit of a gamble or go to the pokies and they are okay. But we are talking about gambling addicts. We do not talk about people who take heroin as 'heroin problem users' or people who are alcoholics as 'problem drinkers'. We are talking about people that absolutely have an addiction. The definition of an addict is 'someone exhibiting a compulsive, chronic psychological or physiological need for a habit-forming substance, behaviour or activity – someone unable to stop taking, using or doing something as a habit.' I stand here today with my colleagues to debate these bills and say that what we are doing is we are protecting people that are out of control and that need our help, and it is important that we do that. That is why we are here to debate these bills.

As I have said, this is will be the third bill that I have spoken on – I did not speak on the third one, so this is the fourth bill that has come to the house – that relates to changes to curb gambling and the harm it brings to Victorians. I do not even like using that word ‘harm’. It is more than that; it is an excruciating lived experience.

In my first sitting year as an MP, in 2023, I spoke on the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, and in fact that was my very first bill debate that I did. That bill made changes to bring Victoria in line with other states so that a greater economic benefit was had for Victoria, ensuring that Crown were on a level playing field with local pubs and clubs. Then in my second sitting year, in 2024, I spoke on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024. That bill established the Gambling Harm Response Fund and provided additional powers to the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, the VGCCC. That bill was just another measure to tackle the harms that come with gambling whilst balancing the legitimate needs of businesses to continue operating effectively. Now, in this, my third sitting year, I am here to speak on the bill we have before us today.

The work on gambling reform has not stopped. We are continuing to make changes, make improvements and ensure that we help Victorians with this prevailing issue in our community. Gambling can destroy and has destroyed people, destroyed relationships, destroyed people’s finances, destroyed lives. Looking at the data is hard. In the last full financial year spend on electronic gaming machines at local pubs and clubs just in my electorate alone is over \$32.8 million. That is \$32.8 million spent. It is an eye-watering amount, but if I expand that out to the two council areas that I have within my electorate, which are the City of Frankston and the Shire of Mornington Peninsula, that amount is over \$153 million in one year alone. It is a staggering amount. That is not on all forms of gambling, so that does not include online gambling or horse racing, footy or whatever, it is just pokie machines.

So it is really important that we debate this. It is important that we do what we can to curb this issue. According to the Australia Institute, Australia has 18 per cent of the entire world’s poker machines, yet we are less than 1 per cent of the world’s population. To say it is not a problem you would have to have your head 10 metres deep in the sand, which is why we are here to debate and pass this bill, to continue our important gambling reforms, because we said we would to the Victorian people.

An estimated 330,000 Victorians experience profound harm as a result of gambling each year, costing Victoria around \$7 billion annually. It is inconceivable to me that Australians lose more to poker machines per capita than any other country in the world. In the last financial year Australians across only five states lost a staggering \$14.5 billion to poker machines in pubs and clubs. Just to be clear, this amount does not include losses to poker machines in casinos. In the 2022–23 financial year Victorians lost over \$3 billion, and that been mentioned before in this chamber today. Again, I remind people that this does not include money lost at the casino. It is a staggering amount of money that people are putting into machines.

These losses cause enormous damage or harm, as this bill states, not just to the people losing the money but also to their families, their friends, their relationships, their mental health, their work environment and their community. This damage includes family violence, homelessness, breakdowns, physical and mental health issues and often suicide attempts. Between 2009 and 2016, when the Victorian Suicide Register was examined, it revealed at least 184 suicides were directly related to gambling harm. I am sorry, but that does not sound like harm to me – it sounds like something much, much worse, and devastation comes to mind. There were an additional 17 gambling-attributed suicides by affected others such as family members. Research concluded that gambling-related suicides were about 4 per cent of total suicides in Victoria, but they also believe it is in fact much higher, possibly as high as 20 per cent of all suicides.

As I have mentioned before, this is the third bill I have spoken on in this chamber that relates to gambling, because the work on reforms does not stop and we will continue to make improvements. The Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 delivers much-needed reform to how gambling is

regulated in Victoria, ensuring the state can continue to derive value from major gambling licences while strengthening protections for the community. The bill modernises the licensing framework for gambling, enhances integrity measures and reinforces responsible gaming initiatives. These reforms ensure Victoria's licensing processes remain robust, transparent and capable of responding to technological changes and the ever-evolving community expectations. Victoria is once again leading the nation on gambling reform, and the Allan Labor government is taking decisive action to update outdated systems, minimise harm and ensure our licensing processes are fit for purpose.

There is more I can say on the bill, but I am running out of time. I started out talking about this idea that there is something positive about what pubs and clubs contribute to the community and also employment, and we need to find a balance between stopping the harm and having these positive experiences. I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:17): I rise to talk on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and from listening sitting in the chamber and also watching down below in the office it has been a very, very wide ranging debate. I think the one thing that we can all agree on is that there are problem gamblers in Victoria and that it is not really their fault that they gamble – it is an addiction. As the member for Hastings said, it is an addiction, and people do struggle not being able to walk into a venue and put money in a machine. We here in the chamber need to make sure that we do have protections in place so that we can help people that suffer from that addiction – not being able to walk into a venue and being drawn to a machine or being drawn into a TAB, whatever it is. We are talking about poker machines here, and we need to make sure that we do all that we can to help them out. This does stem from the findings of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, and as the member for Hastings said, this is the fourth lot of legislation that has come through the house.

We support the people in our community when they need help. Being involved in local sport, being the former president of a sporting club, being involved in local schools and other service clubs around the area, as many a person here would be, we all have those stories that we can tell of particular people that we have known over the journey that have had issues and tried to hide their issues when they have been gambling.

I know that in the sporting fraternity we can tell sometimes. We say people's attitudes change and their personas change – sometimes they are fun to be around, sometimes not so much fun. In doing some research and being involved with trying to help out in the local sporting area, these mood swings are tailor-made and follow their gambling wins and losses.

We come here into the chamber with genuine concern and wanting to work through a bill to get the best result, and we have got to be careful on the flip side. With our pubs and clubs that do have poker machines and our RSLs and our bowling clubs, it has been touched on a few times that we still keep them in mind because they are sometimes the heartbeat of our community by employing people in the venues. They are the lifeblood of a lot of these sporting fraternities and do fundraisers for schools and other activities that they pour a lot of their money into.

So we on this side of the house here need to be making sure that we are sending off a bill which is going to work for the people that need the help, that have an addiction to gambling. But we also need to be making sure that we are not making it too hard, or so hard for venue operators – good venue operators. We know we have got rogue ones. Hopefully they have all been weeded out and left the industry – hopefully. But we need to make sure that we have also got an ear to the concerns of the venue operators, especially in our regional centres, because you may have only one licensed venue in your regional centre, and the whole community revolves around that. And there will be people there that will not want to gamble. I like to walk into a venue and have a meal and have a beer, and I am one of the lucky ones. I am not fussed if I put money in a machine or not, predominantly 99 per cent of the time I will not. But there are those that walk in and will sit down and have a beer, eat their meal as quick as they can and then sneak out the back and go and feed some money into the machines. So we need to make sure that the venue operators are being heard and listened to also.

As I said before – as I think the member for Hastings said – gambling does cost people a lot if they are a problem gambler. From experience I know – not my own experience but my experience of other members in the community that I have been involved with – it does cost people a lot of money. It can sometimes cost marriages or partnerships. It can sometimes cost people their livelihood and business because they just cannot control themselves, and unfortunately – and I have seen this too often and it was touched on before – it does cost people their lives. That is where we as legislators for Victoria need to come together and make sure that we are ticking off every box, to hopefully make a difference and make it harder for people to be able to gamble their life away but also have the services around them so that they can actually get the help that they do need – because for most of us probably we can actually control the urge to spend our hard-earned, but there are those that like to have a bet. And that is fine. If you like to have a bet, that is fine. But we need to make sure we have got the checks and balances in place to be able to do that.

I touched on before our local venues. There are probably a couple of local venues throughout Gippsland – I know back years ago there used to be a lot of sporting places that did have poker machines in their clubrooms. The Traralgon Football Netball Club was one of those, which was the club that I was involved with. But over the journey it did become too hard and too expensive to have these machines, and the club had to get to get rid of that, probably to the betterment, I would say, of what is going on in the community nowadays. But they do move the machines on, so we need to know where they are going.

The RSL clubs are a funny one – they are licensed venues. We have one in Traralgon, and I assume that it is the same at other venues around the state, where the revenue that they raise they actually put back into supporting their members – returned service men and women – who do need help. If they have got mental health issues, they look after them, and they help if they cannot find housing. As I said before, we need to make sure that we are actually highlighting these issues to the government that are trying to bring in the new legislation. We do not want to go too far so that we are having venues that do great work shutting down, as they are (1) employing our people who live in our community and (2) wrapping their arms around people who are in need. These might be people for whom it is their only point of contact for the week, where they might go to the RSL club a couple of times a week and they look forward to doing that. Our bowling clubs – and the Minister for Racing is at the table – and some of our racing venues, especially the Moe Racing Club down in the Latrobe Valley, push an astronomical amount of money back into the community. They support sporting groups, theatre groups and people doing plays, right across the board to schools – not only in the city of Moe but right throughout Gippsland. The Moe Racing Club does a tremendous job.

While we are opposing this because we are trying to highlight some of the issues that we do have with the bill, we can see that we do need to help people who do have a gambling addiction. And as the member for Hastings says, I do not wish to call it a gambling problem because it is a gambling addiction. So, as I said, we are opposing it on this side, but for good reason. It is not that we do not support helping problem gamblers, it is because we also want to support those people who provide the heartbeat for local communities.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (18:27): I join the speakers on this side of the house in support of the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I listened to the contribution by the member for Morwell intensely, which was very much all to do with doing whatever we can to help those in a situation that no-one wants to be in. It is all about harm minimisation, and I will come back to that.

This is an important bill, one of many gambling-related amendment bills that we have had go through this place in recent times. I commend the minister and also the previous minister for bringing this bill forward here today. The host of legislation being delivered shows the commitment of the minister and of this government to gambling harm minimisation – which is extremely important to many of my constituents – and is delivering on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence. This is another important bill, which will amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991.

These are welcome amendments in my electorate – like the member for Hastings, who went through the percentages in his electorate – across the City of Greater Dandenong, the City of Kingston and the south-east. I have spoken on gambling-related harm in the Clarinda district, in my community – the same as in yours, Acting Speaker Mullahy – many times before in this place, and it has continued to be an issue for many.

It is sad to see that the City of Greater Dandenong in particular – where I grew up and which many of my friends and community members who I know from very diverse backgrounds call home – is one of the highest-rated local government areas in terms of suffering from gambling issues. Just look at the number of loans. In the 2023–24 figures, almost \$138 million was lost to pokies in the 14 gambling venues in just the City of Greater Dandenong. This is very high considering the socio-economic situation in our local government area, amounting to the second-highest rate of pokies losses per adult in Victoria. It is devastating that so often this is targeting and hurting those that can least afford it.

We have heard from previous speakers, including the member for Eureka, of the experiences they have gone through. I recall that the member for Eureka has spoken on this bill and related bills on gambling legislation amendments many times, and I know that it is difficult. We heard many speakers before me talk about the causes or the consequences of gambling and gambling addiction, from separations to loss of employment to many things and some serious incidents that might have occurred.

For that reason I would like to acknowledge the many community organisations that have worked so hard to curb or combat gambling-related harm. There are some great community organisations that are working to address the impact, such as the Cambodian Association of Victoria, the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association and the South East Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council, also known as SEMVAC. I commend these organisations for the work that they do and also many of the local community organisations.

We will continue to support this work and to deliver the legislation that will help minimise gaming-related harm wherever possible, and that legislative work continues here today with the Gaming Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. As I mentioned, this is another important bill, which will amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991.

There have been some fantastic contributions, on this side especially and also on the other side, in terms of minimisation of harm related to gaming. I also would like to note in particular the changes here to provide for the disclosure of precommitment information to a casino operator for the purposes of enabling the operation of precommitment during periods of downtime. We know the importance of precommitment. This government brought forward some important changes that set out the framework for mandatory and binding precommitment across Victoria, and that is important because it helps to put power back into consumers' hands and supports them to gamble within their limits, which is very important.

Another change I would like to make note of is the amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991, which are twofold. Firstly, they amend the Casino Control Act to make provision for the removal of cheques as a payment option by gambling providers as cheques are phased out from the Australian financial system, and secondly, the important change to reduce barriers to voluntary exclusion at Melbourne casino.

We know the importance of self-exclusion. Excluding yourself from gambling is a powerful tool to help you manage your gambling. Before coming to this place I ran my own practice. At first I did not understand what self-exclusion was, but one of my former clients – I will not say the name for privacy reasons – came to my office very early in the morning. I remember that day clearly. She talked about how she had to self-exclude, and I could not understand at the time. I had been to casinos but just for recreation, food, movies, to catch up with friends and all of that. This is very important. Sometimes she wanted to exclude herself because of addiction – like the member for Hastings and member for Morwell talked about, it is hard for her. This is very important, and we see it here today. It would help

to restrict access and it can help to support vulnerable people in their decision to change a gambling habit.

There are a whole host of other important changes. Once again I commend the effort of the minister in bringing these changes and others forward and for their commitment to minimising gambling harm in our community. We have seen a really strong commitment from the government in addressing and tackling that harm through the host of legislation that we have introduced, and there is more to work to be done to protect our community from gambling-related harm.

I just would like to conclude by talking about where I came from in terms of the multicultural community in the south-east. We know that many of the people who escape from war-torn countries, escape from persecution, and through no fault of their own they feel isolated and attempt to spend time with others, but sometimes at the wrong place and become addicted. They sacrifice for their journey to a free country like Australia, like Victoria, and then having gone through the settlement process they have to go through a gambling-related issue. The consequence would be unspeakable. I will continue to have the hard and important conversations to address the stigma of gambling harms and encourage help-seeking. For that reason, it is really important that we continue to do everything that we can to support and to protect our community and to deliver legislation, regulations and initiatives that can deliver the real, meaningful change that we need. For that reason, I commend the bill to the house.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (18:37): Today I rise to make a contribution to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I think everyone in this place agrees that we need to do more when it comes to gambling harm and supporting people with addiction. There have been many stories shared in this place, and I myself have shared a couple of incidents. When you go through these bills, I think a lot of those times come back when you have had those really challenging times within a community or a family or with a friend.

Definitely there is so much more to be done, but we also need to make sure we are supporting not only people with gambling addiction but also the venues and the clubs that do such great work within our communities. Just this week I had a great email from one of our local clubs. They are putting on a community event. Every single month they have some event, but for this one in particular they identified the need to support some very vulnerable people in our community. It is that connection that we all need to stop and think about. These clubs do great work, they are businesses, but we need to have really great legislation that supports them as well.

Some of the changes included in the bill are to update and consolidate the process of monitoring gambling licences in order to ensure relatively similar requirements and processes. There are some major changes and concerns with this bill, in particular the concern about another tax grab. I think today, with what we have experienced on the steps of Parliament, the ongoing distress of increasing taxes is continuing, and the introduction of another tax, snuck in through this bill, is just another impost on people of Victoria. It is distressing. I think if many of the people in this chamber, particularly from the other side of the house, had come out onto the steps of Parliament today and listened to some of those people, our farmers, our CFA volunteers, members of the Victorian community, business communities that are so impacted by this new tax – when we stand in this place we have a sense of responsibility, and today I did not see that responsibility. I saw it from this side of the house, going out to the steps, listening and really taking note of what is impacting Victorians and what is impacting our farmers, our CFA volunteers, our businesses, as I said.

When do we get to a point where we can actually all agree on some things? I think today should have been one of those times. This tax that has been imposed on our volunteers, our farmers and our communities is just wrong. If you were not out there today – which I know the other side were not – watch the news, watch the coverage and listen to the people that have been impacted. Listen to their voices, because that is all they want.

Here in this place, as I said, this is just another tax. Whilst we want good legislation, we do not want to see an impost on people and on businesses. As the member for Ovens Valley mentioned, it is expected that the cost of the premium will be passed on by monitoring companies to the venues, creating a situation where it results in a substantial impact on operational costs, particularly in smaller towns across rural and regional Victoria. A lot of these businesses, like the ones I was chatting to you about before, are small venues. They are not multimillion-dollar businesses, so imposing another tax – a new tax from Labor – does impact on their bottom line. Uncertainty about the premium and the term of the licence payment and concern for the industry as a whole does have an impact. Whilst the government claim the premium will be market driven, there is no clear guarantee that this will be the case, and nor will they put a figure on the licence term. The minister claims that the addition of a premium payment will extract better value for the monitoring licence, as he mentioned in his second reading. However, it is clearly defined in clause 7 of the bill as a new tax. We are seeing time and time again these sneaky hidden taxes that this government keeps throwing at Victorians. Just today, as I mentioned on the steps, thousands and thousands of people coming out to protest against tax was something that should hit home to everyone in this place, and we need to do better. The impact of increasing taxes and the cost of living is significant across the state of Victoria.

Today we had the budget – another budget that did not help regional Victorians. We keep ripping the heart out of regional communities with increasing taxes, and the budget is no different. In fact in the budget today there was a further 17 per cent decrease in regional development, and agriculture funding was cut by almost 13 per cent. It is just relentless the way this government is turning its back on the regions. And here we are today with another tax.

Coming back to the bill, as noted, the feedback from stakeholders has been supportive of some of the changes, but there are great concerns about the uncertainty of the new tax and associated costs. We are supportive, as I said, of our local clubs. As the member for Murray Plains raised, these clubs provide a critical service to the community. The member for Murray Plains had a few examples of that, and I have shared some as well. As we mentioned, many of them are smaller venues. Many of my local clubs are very supportive of the local community, and they are also aware of gambling harm and making sure that they do things in a responsible manner.

This bill makes some amendments to the monitoring licence framework. The bill also makes amendments to Victoria's public lottery licensing framework in preparation for the expiry of the current licence in 2028. There are also some minor and non-controversial technical amendments the bill seeks to make, including the proposed phasing out of the use of cheques from the Australian financial system. The bill amends payment of winnings provisions for gaming venue operators, casino operators and bingo centre operations to ensure that payment by electronic funds transfer is always a permitted alternative to payment by cheque. We do know that some people do not know how to do that quite yet, so we will have to work that one out.

The bill will give the state the power to issue a long-term extension of a public lottery licence and will modernise the licensing process in order to make it consistent with the licensing processes for the other major gambling licensees. The bill does include amendments to clarify the functions of the independent review panel that reviews and reports on the licensing processes undertaken by the government. The changes made through the bill will seek to align the panel's process with modernised gambling licensing processes and simplify the process for the minister to refer matters to the panel for review.

The bill will reduce barriers to voluntary exclusion at the Melbourne casino by ensuring the Melbourne casino operator is required to issue an exclusion order on request by a person and removing unnecessary administrative requirements for it to be witnessed. An exclusion order prohibits a person from entering or remaining on casino premises. Under the amendments, it is an offence if a casino operator does not issue an exclusion order to a person upon voluntary application by the person. This is a change from the current provision, which affords the casino operator discretion in deciding whether to issue an exclusion order upon request or not. Self-exclusion is an important mechanism to

address gambling harm. The purpose of clause 71 is to strengthen the regulatory framework for voluntary exclusion orders. Whilst the government is not aware of any situation where the casino operator has refused or would refuse to issue an exclusion order upon request, this change will close a potential loophole.

We would hope in these circumstances that assistance would also be provided to seek help if needed. You would think that should a patron have to exclude themselves that they must be in a very vulnerable position and would hope that help would be provided.

Some other minor amendments the bill seeks to make include enabling the continued operation of precommitment at Crown Casino in Melbourne. The amendments the bill seeks to make will enable Crown to securely keep a temporary database of precommitment information and players' last known limits in order to ensure the effective operation of the precommitment functions, unless communication with the statewide system is re-established.

As we know, the YourPlay technology is outdated and unreliable, and it is in effect posing unnecessary barriers for patrons, particularly compared to the more sophisticated system that is used at Crown, which uses picture-in-picture graphics to guide players. This is forcing community clubs to have to adopt a less sophisticated system and creating a two-tiered approach that unfairly disadvantages small and not-for-profit venues. In addition to all of this, compelling patrons to track their recreational activities raises significant privacy concerns and risks alienating casual players who just want to enjoy local, affordable and legal entertainment. I think, on that note, when we talk about people coming in to use a venue, particularly when it comes to social connection, many people do not get to connect to community, and sometimes heading out to a club or a venue is their way of coming together. I think it is really important that we think about that.

Getting back to people, I know the member for Eureka has shared her story, and those of others, in this place many, many times about the impact on communities when we do not have the correct mechanisms to support people that are going through challenging times with their addiction and gambling harm. One of my closest friends – I have raised it in this place – lost his house and his job. He lost everything. He was being very clever, and often you find people with gambling harm do cover it well. How do we actually help in those circumstances? We had a staff member many years ago – I have raised this in this place – a young girl, a casual girl, and we knew there was money missing, but we did not think it was her. That is quite awful at times. You are sitting in your workplace – this was my husband's business – and thinking it is perhaps this person taking money. We ended up finding out it was the young girl. You try and support someone, but they have taken tens of thousands of dollars through your business. You want to help. It is all very well to call in the police and do things that you think should be in place when it is really a crime, but more than that we wanted to support this person and make sure that, for her future, she could have the help in place that she needed. She was a young mum, she was a casual worker and she had an addiction. So in that place, we need to do better.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (18:48): I too rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I am very pleased to rise to speak on this bill as it is a really important issue that affects every community across the state. At the outset, I firstly just want to reflect on a number of contributions that have been made on our side of the house. Every time the member for Eureka speaks on such a bill it does come from a place of lived experience, and I have huge respect for what she brought to this debate. I also want to acknowledge the member for Point Cook and his exposé of some of the ways that the community benefit scheme is run. I think he elucidated that very clearly. I know that he and I have been in discussions about some of the premises in my own electorate, where many of the community benefits that are claimed are largely just going to supporting the running of clubs, and you do question how that community benefit value is actually determined to derive a community benefit. Yes, there are examples where there are clearly community benefits that they are providing, whether it be the welfare services of RSL clubs or the sponsorship of footy clubs or the like, but there

is a significant amount of community benefit which seems to be a cyclical response that is just going back into reinvestment into club operations, and I think it is well worthy of investigation.

This bill sits within the history of reform that we are doing in this space. I want to thank the minister at the table, the Minister for Police, and the previous minister as well, for really driving a lot of this reform in this space. It is not easy. There are a lot of vested interests in the gambling sector, but we have to above all else remember that what we are trying to do is to protect the community from the excesses of gambling harm and recognise, as I think we all do, that gambling for some people is a fun activity that can occur relatively infrequently and that for some people it is a health issue – it is an addiction that is really, really a struggle to get out of.

I know I have spoken in this place before about a number of people who I have been close with, through friends or relatives of friends, who have been particularly affected by gambling. It is a spiral that you can get into almost without realising it, and before you know it you are in a very difficult financial position. As the member for Shepparton said, then those people often go to lengths to try to hide it from their friends and family, and then the position that they get themselves into worsens and worsens over time, and that can affect a whole part of their lives. It is a really challenging environment.

I think that it is a real credit to this Labor government over many years that we have been taking so many steps to try and reduce the impact of gambling harm through reforms such as those we have been talking about today but also the reforms that we have done up to now, including establishing the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission to introduce Australia's strongest gambling regulator and introducing mandatory carded play for pokies at Crown and the mandatory closure periods, where all hotels and clubs must close gaming areas between 4 am and 10 am, rather than having that shift where gamblers might move from one venue to another because they know that those venues are open.

I had the privilege of sitting on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for a period of time when we were considering the Auditor-General's reports that were looking at gambling and alcohol harm, and there was one particular session where we heard from young people affected by gambling. There was one individual in particular whose honesty and bravery really struck me. Probably he was only 20, if that. Through his teenage years he had started gambling, and it became a terrible addiction for him, and his ability to get out of that and get the help that he needed to move beyond that was such a powerful message. For somebody so young to have gone through that process and been captured by the lights and noises of gambling and the addiction of getting that win on the board and been able to then come out of that after realising that he was in so much trouble was a real credit to him as a young man.

His ability and bravery of being able to speak to that in a public forum to people of his age group but then also speak to decision-makers in the PAEC inquiry I think was absolutely tremendous and will be a memory of that committee hearing that sticks with me.

I do want to talk a little bit about clauses 71 and 72, which deal with the matter of voluntary exclusion or exclusion orders more generally. In particular, clause 71 imposes a penalty. If there is a voluntary application by a person to the casino operator, the casino operator must give the person a written order under that section prohibiting the person from entering or remaining in the casino, and attached to that clause is a penalty of 250 penalty units. I think this is a really important clause. I take the member for Shepparton's note that this may have not occurred in the past, but I think it is really important that we respect the voluntary exclusion application that an individual would go through.

I cannot even start to imagine how difficult it would be for someone who is suffering that gambling harm to actually put themselves in that position to say, 'I need to be voluntarily excluded from your premises because I know that once I get in, that will be too difficult for me to extract myself.' We cannot have a situation where we have a casino that would ignore that exclusion order or try to welcome them in in any particular way because they say, 'Well, we're not really penalised, so why do

we have to face any particular consequences?’ The casino operates not just on a regulatory licence but on a social licence. For that social licence to continue, it needs to be a good citizen, and part of being a good citizen is honouring and respecting those who are making those applications.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (18:58): I am very pleased to have a very short opportunity to contribute on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and have the terrific insights from the member for Melton, who is supporting me in this endeavour. It is an opportunity for me particularly to acknowledge the hard work of so many people who have contributed on this debate, including the Deputy Speaker, the member for Ashwood, and of course the member for Eureka, who always makes heartfelt contributions, and I am always grateful for the member for Narre Warren South, who is often taking us on a journey as it relates to the damage to so many communities.

I am going to very quickly say how grateful I am to Dr Mark Zirnsak and Reverend Tim Costello. In a previous life I was able to work inside the Uniting Church in a role that allowed me to spend quite a lot of time with some of the great thinkers and reformers of the Victorian community, so it is an opportunity for me to put on the record how grateful I am to people who have worked long and hard over many years. And of course, with the member for Frankston next to me, I am always remembering the work of Peta Murphy over many years, right up until those courageous last days when she continued to fight for reform.

Our hardworking minister has brought such important legislation and so many important reforms to this place that do need to strike a balance between what we know is a leisure activity that is legal but also what we know to be something that causes extraordinary harm to so many in our community. That is why those thoughtful contributions come from both sides as people consider how we introduce a framework that takes that commonsense approach to gambling reform.

The SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

Assembly divided on motion:

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

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

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Country Fire Authority funding

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (19:06): (1151) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the government to finally fund the Foster and Mirboo North fire stations. I say this in the obvious context of what has happened today both in the budget and in the protests on the front steps of Parliament, where thousands and thousands of people came out to quite rightly condemn the government for its emergency services tax. Now that the government has got the emergency services tax through, where is the support for CFA stations and fire trucks?

I picked up the budget papers today, and there is certainly no reference to Foster or Mirboo North, which we have been campaigning on for years. Indeed the CFA itself funded both of these stations, along with Yarram, out of its capital program ahead of the 2022 election. Subsequently that money has gone missing.

I raise that as well in the context that budget paper 3 outlines some money for CFA stations today, under 'Building more Country Fire Authority stations' – this is on page 78 of budget paper 3 – and it lists a footnote to that:

This includes funding provided to complete stations at Dartmoor, Leitchville, Kinglake West, Raywood and Yarram.

Well, Yarram had already been funded, so why is there now more funding required for it? More particularly, when I read what this actual funding is about, it includes funding to deliver a number of CFA stations, including Hoddles Creek and Winnindoo. It was announced in the COVID budget in 2020 that the government was going to build a new station for Winnindoo. Here we are 5½ years later and it still has not been completed, and they are reannouncing it in this year's budget, which I am sure Ton and the Winnindoo brigade will be very excited about, but they have been waiting for a long time.

More particularly, so have the Foster and Mirboo North brigades. Dave Jones at Foster has just about torn his hair out, but they have actually got land. There is now a lease agreement with VicTrack for a site. Mirboo North is still I think looking for a site, because CFA went ahead and bought one that did not actually suit, so that is still an issue. We actually need the funding to rebuild these fire stations, both of which are so small that there are bits of bricks missing from the sides of the buildings because the trucks are too big. The stations are actually restricted in getting certain trucks, because they are too big for the stations that they have got, and it is a safety issue where there is not enough space for the volunteers to get changed while trucks are backing in and out. Foster and Mirboo North have been waiting for too long. If the government is genuine about supporting our CFA and our fire services, this is where we need to see some of the rubber hitting the road. These stations should be funded.

Bemin Secondary College

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:09): (1152) My adjournment is for the Deputy Premier as the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the Deputy Premier join me in my electorate of Laverton to visit Bemin Secondary College out in the mighty Truganina. As the Deputy Premier knows, Bemin Secondary is Truganina's first high school and was opened by our government just last year. As many here know, when we built this school we made the great decision to split the school into two mighty campuses – the senior campus on Morris Road and a second junior campus at the Trug North education precinct in the Elements estate, which is also home, mind you, to Warreen Primary School, a great local primary school.

This happens to be a major winner out of this year's budget, and I am so happy to announce to the Truganina community that this school will be receiving \$37 million to commence stage 2 works. This is something that I have been talking about with the local principal Jo for many, many months now. As the local member I had the tremendous privilege, along with our Premier Jacinta Allan, of calling Jo and letting her know we did it – the funding was finally on its way. That is why I would welcome the chance for the Deputy Premier to come back to Bembin Secondary College, meet with the principal and the local school community and find out firsthand just how much the school will benefit from this tremendous investment now and into the future.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:11): (1153) My adjournment matter is to the Premier, and the action I seek is for her to take a drive, or better still catch one of her so-called upgraded VLocity trains, to South-West Coast and see firsthand the devastation that her government's latest tax, the emergency services and volunteers levy, and the other 60 taxes imposed on Victorians before it are having on our communities.

This new tax is nothing short of a slap in the face to every hardworking Victorian, especially those in the regions. Households will be paying double. For commercial properties, there will be a massive increase for them too. For primary producers, the people feeding our state, the levy has tripled – tripled – and the government has even managed to ensure that renters will cop it too, all this during a cost-of-living crisis and one of the worst droughts we have seen since records began in the early 1900s.

This week a Warrnambool paper reported 12 businesses are preparing to shut their doors because they simply cannot keep up with cost pressures – and it is not just dollars and cents. Farmers are telling me they are on the brink. The mental strain I am witnessing when talking to these stoic farmers, caused by this new tax grab on top of the drought, will have ramifications. Country people do not cry out for help, but when they do, you should listen. Instead Labor has lumbered them with another tax.

To make matters worse, the Allan Labor government has chosen to hand out a discount on this tax to multinational wind and solar developers, many of them foreign owned. These corporations, which already benefit from generous government subsidies, are being spared the financial burden that is being heaped on the shoulders of Victorian families, households, small businesses, renters and farmers. How is it fair that those doing it tough in a drought and a cost-of-living crisis are expected to pay more while multibillion-dollar companies are let off the hook? Farmers are expected to fund emergency services when they volunteer as CFA members.

The Liberal and National parties stood proudly today with thousands of Victorians on the steps of Parliament, announcing that we will repeal this tax if elected. But Victorians should not have to wait 557 days for the next election for relief; the government must listen and scrap the tax now. Premier, come to the south-west, look the CFA volunteers, struggling farmers, hardworking business owners, home owners and renters in the eye and explain to them why they are being punished and why multinationals are being rewarded. This tax is unjust and unfair and must be scrapped.

San Remo Primary School

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (19:14): (1154) My adjournment matter is for the Deputy Premier as the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the Deputy Premier to come to visit San Remo Primary School and see the incredible spirit of the school community and the exciting journey ahead, thanks to this year's state budget's \$5.3 million investment.

This investment is a testament to the strength, passion and persistence of our local community. Thank you to principal Karen Bowker, to the school council, to every parent, teacher, student and community member who raised their voice and to the year 5s and 6s for penning so many extraordinary and rather direct letters addressed to our Premier. Your continued advocacy made this possible.

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Here is a snapshot of some of the student voices. From Mikey:

Our school is starting to turn into an avocado – good on the outside, yucky inside.

From Ariana:

We do not want our school to be left behind.

Indy says:

I love my school, but it is in desperate need of an upgrade.

Holly and Bella say:

You promised \$5.3 million. Our school deserves it.

And from Zilly and Emily:

We want our buildings to match how great our school is.

Dustin and Otis said:

We want our preps to year 4s to have modern learning spaces.

And Summer and Isabel went on to say:

Our school is growing and so our learning environment and resources need to as well.

The students and the entire school community are worth it.

Aggravated crime legislation

Jess WILSON (Kew) (19:15): (1155) My adjournment is to the Premier, and the action I am seeking is for the Allan Labor government to put community safety first and immediately classify machetes as prohibited weapons. Victoria is in the grip of a worsening crime crisis, and Labor's weak laws are to blame. The facts do not lie: since the Premier took office in 2023, crime has increased 19 per cent. Crime across Victoria has soared by 16 per cent in the last 12 months. Over the past decade aggravated burglaries have increased 169 per cent in Victoria, and youth crime has climbed to the highest level since the electronic records began in 1993. In my electorate of Kew crime increased 16.5 per cent in the last year, higher than the state average. Retail theft is up 30 per cent, motor vehicle theft is up 37 per cent and aggravated burglary or home invasions are up 32 per cent.

While these statistics paint a frightening picture, it is the personal stories of victims that really demonstrate the gravity of the crime crisis in this state. Last week five balaclava-hooded offenders wielding machetes kicked down the front door of a home in Kew, with three of them entering the home. I am sure you are picturing this occurring in the dead of night under the cover darkness, but no, these brazen offenders kicked down the door and entered the home in the middle of the day in full view of the street. 19-year-old Charlie was home alone upstairs when he heard a loud thud downstairs. Walking to the stairs to investigate, he found one of the offenders coming up the stairs holding a machete. Bravely, Charlie yelled at him, but the offender taunted back, swinging the machete. Thank God the offenders fled, and our dedicated Boroondara police responded quickly.

This never should have happened. While Charlie is physically okay, the trauma of this home invasion will have a lasting impact. As Charlie's dad said to me, imagine if it had been his daughter or his wife home alone. Instead, the police tell us that these violent crimes are all too common, because nothing is done to stop the offenders given the current revolving door when it comes to Victoria's weak bail laws. This Labor government under the Premier's watch is failing in its most sacred duty – to keep Victorians safe. In the words of Charlie's dad Andrew:

Kerri and I lay the blame of this disgusting attack on our family squarely with the failings of the Allan Labour Government, which has allowed criminal youths to mock us and believe there are no consequences for their crimes. The government is failing its citizens own safety in their own homes.

Labor was dragged to the table to finally adopt the Victorian Liberals' and Nationals' plan to ban machetes, yet the Allan Labor government has delayed their classification of machetes as prohibited weapons until September this year, meaning offenders wielding machetes today, including last week in Charlie's home, do not face the full consequences of the law. Premier, how have you let it come to this? You must make machetes a prohibited weapon now.

Anakie Community House

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:18): (1156) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Regional Development. The action that I seek from the minister is to visit Anakie Community House to see the progress that the Anakie & District Community Group have made towards the community garden since receiving a Tiny Towns grant last year.

In 2024 the Anakie and District Community Group were successful recipients of a round one Tiny Towns grant worth \$19,800 to put towards upgrading the garden at their community house. Since receiving the grant, the committee members have been putting in hard work behind the scenes to get started on the physical work of the project. I have visited Anakie Community House many times, and I have seen just how much the local community values the use of a communal garden space and how significant it is to them. The community is also very thankful for being recipients of the fund, and it will be wonderful to have the minister visit Anakie Community House and see the important work that they have been doing on the project since receiving the grant, and I look forward to hosting the minister.

West Gippsland Hospital

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:19): (1157) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that the minister provide an update on the current status of the new West Gippsland Hospital in light of today's state budget being released. It is unfortunate that I have to raise this again. Six months ago, on 12 November, I raised this adjournment issue for the Minister for Health – it was after my father died – to get a clear timeline on when the West Gippsland Hospital will start. To date, that question has not been answered, and I am sorry to say but that is really pathetic, to wait six months for an answer on a very important subject.

To put it into context, the West Gippsland Hospital was committed to by the Liberals in 2017 and again in 2022, then the Labor government came on board and they committed to this hospital in late October 2022. They said it was going to start in 2024. It still has not started. In today's budget there was no uplift for that hospital – none at all, no uplift of funding. I am getting increasingly concerned when I see a line in the budget today that says 'Reduce project scope \$12.9 million'. When I was a builder, if a client came to me and said 'Reduce project scope', what do you think that meant? That means cuts. Is it to the West Gippsland Hospital or is it to the Wonthaggi Hospital in the member for Bass's region? There are four hospitals lumped into this. Is it the Queen Elizabeth II or the Dandenong Hospital? I want to know now what the reduced project scope is. Is it less beds? Is it less emergency department area? Is it less birthing suites? The minister has to come clean for the people of Narracan. When will the West Gippsland Hospital start? After today's budget, I cannot see it starting any sooner than the back end of 2026, and that is two years after the commitment was meant to start.

It is not good enough to sit here and tell me, 'You do not know the difference between planning and building.' I know the difference. I have got more building experience than anyone else in this chamber. And for my community to be treated like this by the Minister for Health is disgraceful. It is the fastest growing area in Australia, Warragul and Drouin. This hospital is probably the greatest need in Victoria, yet I cannot get one straight answer out of her. It is disgraceful. I am angry, my community is angry. We have had enough. We want to know a date when it will start.

Public transport fares

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (19:22): (1158) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to update my community on

the benefits of the free kids public transport policy that has been announced in the state budget. This one is an absolute banger for the Mordialloc electorate. This is one of the highest populated education areas in the state. The Mentone education precinct has so many students coming up and down the Frankston train line and on buses accessing their place of education, some of the best education facilities and teachers you will see in the state. So to have an announcement that looks at how we support families during cost-of-living times and to make sure students are supported is truly inspiring policy, and I thank the Premier and the Minister for Public and Active Transport for announcing this policy, because it will benefit so many families in my community.

If you spend enough time in my patch and you go to Mordialloc train station, you will see kids at Mordialloc College getting off or you will see Parkdale Secondary kids getting off to go on their destination. They have got there normally on a yearly ticket, because they are going up and down each and every day. That on average per student is about \$755. That is a parent or a grandparent or guardian who is having to fork out that amount – money that they have had to find during some of the more challenging times in the family budgets to make ends meet. And then you go to Parkdale train station, you see St Bede's and Kilbreda legends going north towards Mentone, Mentone Grammar kids, Mentone Girls' Grammar. If you go a bit further up towards Mentone, you have got Mentone Girls' Secondary College students and you have got Beaumaris Secondary College students. And then to the north some of the constituents go to Cheltenham Secondary College.

One thing is consistent and clear: the impact it has on school budgets, with uniforms and books and all the essentials that help our kids learn. They will be met with some of the school saving bonus payments that we have had as well to support communities. At the same time, those transport costs have been a huge impact. To think, for a family of three kids who are travelling up and down the Frankston train line, that that may save up to \$2,200 per year is absolutely amazing. It will make such a massive difference and make sure that we are taking pressure off Victorian families when they need it most.

We think about all the school upgrades that have been had through that area. We are making sure that our schools have the very best facilities – first-class facilities to match the first-class education that we are supporting families with the cost of living when they need it most. They know that the Premier and the public transport minister and me as the proud member for Mordialloc are on their side when they need it most. We are focused on doing what matters for communities and focused on what is important for our families. I am pretty pumped about this one, and I am looking forward to an update from the Minister for Public and Active Transport on the free kids transport policy.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (19:25): (1159) My adjournment this evening is for the Treasurer in the other place. The action I am seeking is for the Treasurer to provide an explanation as to why my seat of Prahran has been totally dismissed and ignored in the budget delivered today. There has been no funding for upgrades to vital community facilities such as sporting clubs and schools and a total disregard for the crime issues plaguing my seat.

The seat of Prahran is the home to the Toorak Prahran Cricket Club and the Melbourne Rugby Union Club. They play on the grounds at Orrong Park. The Toorak Prahran Cricket Club is the largest cricket club in Victoria and the second largest in Australia, with 650 members. It has got a growing membership of females, and the club has a long history of women's cricket, with 96 players who have represented Prahran in first grade women's cricket. They boast exceptional alumni like Sam Loxton, Chris Rogers, David Hussey and Bryce McGain. The rugby union club has over 400 members, with alumni such as Sir Edward Weary Dunlop, Matt Cockbain, Geoff Vaughan and Rob Leota. They have the Melbourne RFC ladies team, which launched this year. The clubs utilise the grounds at Orrong Park. The clubrooms are in total disrepair. They have a sink but no kitchenette to use for functions to raise vital funds for the club and no girls change rooms.

In another part of my electorate I have St Kilda Primary School, with over 500 students. It had a school hall demolished in 2020 to make way for a new building. The initial plans provided a new school hall as part of the new building project. However, at the very last moment the hall was removed from the final plans without any consultation with the local community. Since that time the school has been forced to hold their assemblies outdoors, which of course means that they have to be cancelled if the weather is too hot or too cold. The students have nowhere to go at lunchtime. On wet days there is no gym space and there are no PE lessons, drama classes or other school activities that require a large indoor area. Over 50 per cent of the over 500 students live in apartments, and they need space – space to learn and play. A new school hall would have allowed them to hold the assemblies and gym classes without having to worry about the weather. Importantly, after school hours the hall would be a valuable community resource to be used for sporting and recreational facilities. The seat of Prahran is a diverse seat, with constituents using these facilities who are from some of the lower socio-economic groups, and they are doing it tough.

Since my election I have spoken endlessly about the lack of police resources and funding for Prahran police station and more CCTV units, and we have seen nothing, only a 20 per cent increase in crime in the last 12 months. It is disgraceful.

My voice has been heard across mainstream media. Chapel Street runs through the electorate – once a major tourism destination, it has been ignored, and my constituents deserve an explanation. I urge the Labor government not to ignore the people of Prahran. I call on the Treasurer to commit the funds needed to upgrade my local sporting facilities, invest in the education facilities at St Kilda Primary School and support me in my endeavours to support Prahran.

Preston electorate trees

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (19:28): (1160) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment. The action I seek is for the minister to join me at the Northern Pipe Trail in Preston to see firsthand how our government is planting more trees, shrubs and ground cover to improve our urban environment and to discuss what further funding announced in today's budget will help us achieve.

This is a topic that I have talked about at quite some length. There are some significant differences across Melbourne in the tree canopy cover that we see. The members for Prahran and Kew, who are with us at the moment, have some suburbs in their electorate that have famously very leafy environments with more than 25 per cent tree canopy. Then of course you come across to Preston and Reservoir which average about 8.5 per cent. That is partly a factor of geography, but there are still lots of parts of Preston and Reservoir that are quite leafy. We know now how to grow trees there, and we are very pleased that the new plan for Victoria sets an ambitious 30 per cent tree canopy target for all of our urban areas.

But of course in order to achieve that target we have to plant more trees, and that is exactly what we have been doing in Preston and Reservoir. Volunteers from Friends of Edwardes Lake have planted nearly 20,000 different native plants with the support of a \$300,000 Green Links fund from our government. We appreciate also the support of Darebin council for that planting. Also, we were very pleased to see our federal Labor government re-elected, and they will make a further contribution to greening Edwardes Lake. On High Street trees funded through some of our government's Living Local grants are growing nicely.

In Reservoir, on Cheddar Road, the median strip has been planted thanks to the Reservoir Suburban Revitalisation Board, an initiative of this government. In particular we have seen a huge transformation between Preston and Bell stations due to the level crossing removal project. We were there on the weekend with the Premier, and she was marvelling at how since she had last been there with me 2½ years ago 6 hectares of space had been transformed from a barren construction site into a green area with thousands and thousands of plants planted. The work unfortunately has been wonderful up to Preston station and then does peter out a bit as you head further north. That is why we are very excited

that in the budget \$190,000 has been allocated for more tree planting along the Northern Pipe Trail, in that exact location. That is why I am inviting the minister to join me, ideally perhaps with his bike helmet, and we can ride along to see how those trees will make a difference to our urban environment.

Many will be familiar with this government's great trees for the west initiative. We are very pleased with this initiative, and I know the Minister for Veterans knows it well. This new initiative is a specific line item for more tree planting in Preston. We hope it is just the first of many towards us achieving our 30 per cent tree canopy target. We thank the minister for all his great work in the portfolio and for his consideration of this adjournment matter.

Responses

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (19:31): The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide funding for Mirboo North and Foster CFAs. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the attention of the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to visit Bemlin Secondary College in Truganina and talk about the fantastic announcements of funding for the local school community. The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Premier, and the action the member seeks is for the Premier to travel to the member's electorate to discuss matters affecting the farmers in that electorate.

The member for Bass raised a matter for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to visit San Remo Primary School and meet with the students and the school community. The member for Kew raised a matter for the Premier, and the action the member seeks is for the Premier to ban machetes in the state. The member for Prahran raised a matter for the Treasurer in the other place and requested an update on the state budget for her electorate. The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and requested an update on the free transport for kids policy.

The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Minister for Health and requested an update on West Gippsland Hospital. The member for Preston raised a matter for the Minister for Environment seeking that he visit the Northern Pipe Trail in Preston to see firsthand the tree planting program across the electorate. The member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Regional Development, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to visit Anakie Community House to meet with the Anakie & District Community Group and see firsthand the great work that they are doing in their project for the community garden. I think that has covered everybody. I will refer the matters raised to the relevant ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until next week.

House adjourned 7:35 pm.