



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 28 May 2025**



**Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

**60th Parliament**

**Speaker**

Maree Edwards

**Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

**Acting Speakers**

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

**Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier**

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier**

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

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

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

**Leader of the Nationals**

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

**Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

**Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

**Manager of Opposition Business**

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### 60th Parliament

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

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Greens until 1 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> Resigned 23 November 2024

<sup>7</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

<sup>8</sup> Resigned 6 January 2025

<sup>9</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>10</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

<sup>11</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

#### Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,  
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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**Wednesday 28 May 2025**

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

*Bills*

**Control of Weapons Amendment (Machete Ban) Bill 2025**

*Introduction*

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (09:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill to amend the Control of Weapons Act 1990 and the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Act 2025 and for other purposes.

There is nothing more important than to ensure we see a ban on machetes, not just on the shelves but on the streets. What this government has done today is a half job, a half-baked job where they are putting all their attention on removing machetes from the shelves – even doing that in a complicated way where retailers today are so confused about what a machete actually is – and leaving all the machetes on the streets until September. Why is the government not listening to Victorians and ensuring that we have an immediate ban on these machetes today? That is what we need to be arguing today, and that is why I am asking for the government to come together and ensure that these machetes are banned not just on the shelves but on the streets today. There is nothing more important than for us to come together as a Parliament and ensure that these machetes are banned from the streets today. If the government does not listen, we will have machetes on the streets for another four months. How many lives will be lost in four months? How many Victorians will be terrorised in four months? It is not good enough to wait for four months.

We know that this is the fifth attempt for the government to ultimately get this right. We have had four attempts. Eighteen months ago the Leader of the Opposition first tried to introduce this bill into the Parliament. If the government had listened, we would not have the problem that we have today with the machetes on the streets that we see each and every day in these attacks. We saw what happened in Northland, a shopping centre that was shut down, locked down. People were terrorised, and the government finally said, ‘We’ll do something.’ Well, their something is not good enough. We also know it was not the first shopping centre attack; there have been three other shopping centre attacks, including one in Werribee in which the Werribee shopping centre was locked down. The government is not listening and Victorians’ safety is being compromised, and it is simply not good enough.

In the period from the introduction in March until now there have been 11 violent attacks using machetes, whether it be in people’s homes, whether it be inside people’s bedrooms, whether it be in their place of work or whether it be in shopping centres. People will not stop until we have a full, comprehensive ban. There need to be consequences. There need to be laws, and this ban on machetes needs to be on the streets, not just on the shelves.

Now the government is scrambling to even work out what the definition of ‘machete’ is, and that alone is very, very concerning. The fact that we have retailers today trying to work out what is being banned and what is not being banned shows that this government simply is not up to the job. But we are here today to work with the government and say, ‘Let’s get this ban done.’ Government cannot turn their backs and forget about the thousands of machetes that are on the streets and focus on the retailers that have them on the shelves. They have got to be banned on the streets. We know that many of these crooks are holding a machete up in a sign of strength. There need to be consequences. By banning machetes today there would be a two-year imprisonment sentence that could be issued to those people that carry those machetes on the streets. Those are the consequences that we need.

So many of these offenders have been on bail, and that is why this side of the Parliament, the Liberal–Nationals, have introduced our policy of ‘Break bail and face jail’. We are working to ensure that the

community are safe. We are putting Victorians first when it comes to safety. This government is failing. They have been soft on crime and they have done nothing when it comes to all of this, and now they are scrambling to make it up, leaving it all to retailers to fix the problem. Well, it is the government's problem. It is the government's mess, and the government has got to fix it. If this government, the Allan Labor government, were serious, they would work with the opposition today and ensure an immediate ban on machetes on the streets and also on the shelves. That is what we need.

Victoria Police want this to happen. That was the excuse that was being made for months – that Victoria Police was not giving them advice. Victoria Police has given the government advice. It is time for the government to act. Every single day of delay is a delay that compromises Victorians' safety. How many lives are going to be lost between now and September? This government will have blood on their hands if they do not react now and ensure that machetes are banned on the streets today.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (09:38): I am pleased this morning to take the volume down a few decibels and go back to some of the facts when it comes to this important motion before the house. As you know and members of this side of the house know, this government is focused on making sure we are listening to the advice of Victoria Police, making sure that we are working each and every day to work with Victoria Police and its agencies and making sure we act quickly and decisively, as was done by the Premier, the Minister for Police and the Minister for Consumer Affairs with all the announcements that were made on Monday.

What we have again seen this morning from those opposite is another act of the games that get played in this place, and what we have seen, certainly yesterday and on many other instances that we have been in the house and at other times, is absolute chaos and division from those on the other side of the house. I suggest that those opposite might want to focus on some of their own internal matters, maybe getting those in order and maybe getting some of those matters addressed, whilst we of course focus on what is a very important issue within our community.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Victoria Police and acknowledge the incredible work that is done by Victoria Police in my community and every single community across our state. We will of course continue to listen to the advice of Victoria Police and continue to give them the power and resources they need to be able to do the incredibly important work that they do. On top of that, we also have made the announcements that were made by the Premier that I referenced earlier on Monday, and we will continue to make sure that we are focused on those matters.

From midday today we know of course that the ban on the sale of machetes will come into place. It forms part of a broader suite of work that this government has been focused on. Again, to every single person in the community: we of course extend our thanks and our appreciation for the wonderful work that you do – not just VicPol but all of the other agencies, member for Mordialloc, in your community and communities right across the state, indeed in both houses.

I will make the point that, unfortunately, what we saw yesterday was a fairly lacklustre budget reply. It was pretty ordinary. It was pretty flat, and that is okay. But we will make sure that we are focused on supporting every single Victorian and working with the incredible team that is VicPol to ensure that they have the power and the resources to deal with these matters, and we will continue to support that work.

What we have seen this morning and yesterday, which was really a circus of a day in here, has been just a very, very ordinary performance. I think members on this side of the house know, but most importantly Victorians know, that being focused on the matters at hand, being focused on community safety and investing through the budget and all portfolio areas in community safety is something that has absolutely been outlined by the Premier and of course the Minister for Police and the entire government. We on this side of the house know and understand that these games that get played in here are probably more a reflection of whatever internal matters are going on within that side of the house.



What is most important is not those cheap political games but being focused on community safety. Every time I have the opportunity to visit local members of the police in my community I take the opportunity to thank them for the work that they do. It must be an incredibly tough and challenging job. They need a government and a community that are with them, that support them, and each and every opportunity that we have got to do so, whether that be through legislation in this place, whether that be through the budget or whether that be through a whole range of committee processes and indeed those matters that get taken outside of this place, we will support the men and women of Victoria Police and every single Victorian to be the best they can be and make our community as safe as possible.

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (09:43): If the member for Sunbury is serious about wanting to support Victoria Police, then the member for Sunbury should vote for this bill. The member for Sunbury should make sure that we get machetes off the streets and make the lives and work of Victoria Police and every first responder safer, because Victoria Police are not safe when we have machetes on the streets, being used to attack people, being used to injure people, being used to threaten people. That is what this bill is all about. This bill is about saying: why wait? Is Victoria going to be safer or more dangerous if we keep dangerous machetes on the streets for another four months? The answer is: more dangerous. This bill is an opportunity to get those machetes off the streets today – today – not wait for four months. You can get them off the shelves at midday, but they are still on the streets at midday as well. That does not keep Victorians safe.

The question is: why wait? What is this government's problem? It is a pattern of behaviour we have seen. On bail laws, how many times did this side of the house seek to introduce bills to strengthen bail laws in Victoria, only to be blocked by those opposite because they thought they knew best? They blocked on bail; now they are blocking on machetes too. It is a sign of a government that is weak, it is a sign of a government that has lost control of the agenda and it is a sign of a government that is so paralysed that it will not vote for good legislation simply because it did not bring it forward. That is where we are with this government. After 11 long years they have given up the ghost. If they cannot bring themselves to vote to support a bill to make Victorians safer today, then this government has really also given up the right to govern on behalf of Victorians. We are not talking about an isolated issue, one or two here or there. As the member for Caulfield mentioned, this has happened over 11 times this year – just those reported in the media. How many times it has not been reported is another issue, but at least 11 times, as reported in the media, people have been attacked or threatened by machetes in this state.

These implements have no place on our streets. They have no place being used in homes. They certainly have no place turning up in the bedrooms of children in my electorate at 2:30 in the morning – people standing over a child in their bed at 2:30 in the morning with a machete. But this government says, 'Oh, that's okay. We're not going to make that a prohibited weapon until September.' Why? Because the government wants to have bins outside police stations. Is the government serious? That is their excuse to keep dangerous machetes on the streets – because we cannot get bins out to cop shops. What a joke – what an absolute joke – and what an insult to the men and women of Victoria Police. I really do not like the fact that this government tries to hide behind the blue shirts of Victoria Police and blame them for a delay. If you speak to any police officer on the street and ask them if dangerous machetes should be prohibited weapons today or in four months time, I will tell you what their answer will be: 'Get them off the streets today. Make our lives safer today. Make our work safer today.' That is what Victoria Police wants. But this government will use anybody and anything as an excuse for its own incompetence, its own inability to get things right. We have seen it with bail. The government still cannot get it right on bail – we still have weak bail laws and the government still will not support this side of the house's 'break bail, face jail' policies – and now we see it on machetes.

I really wonder if members of the opposite side would feel comfortable going back to their electorates and saying, 'Do you know what I did today in your name? I voted to keep dangerous machetes on the streets for another four months.' That is what this vote is going to do, no doubt about it. You are either

going to be voting to keep dangerous machetes on the streets in the hands of criminals for another four months or you are going to vote to ban them today. That is what this vote is all about. It is time for this government to grow up. It is time for this government to get serious. It is time for this government to do something constructive about keeping Victorians safe and about keeping the men and women of Victoria Police safe. It is time for this government to realise it has lost control. Just because we have got good ideas, they should not be blocked on that basis. Mark my words, any time there is another machete attack between now and September – and I am very sad to say history tells us there will be – this government needs to own up to its responsibility. If this government votes against this motion, this government is voting to keep dangerous machetes on our streets for another four months, and for that this government should be condemned.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (09:48): I rise to oppose this motion. Performative vein-throbbing outrage is not a solution to complex policy issues. I will be returning to my electorate of Greenvale to talk about the work that we are doing to keep this community safe, to keep my community safe and to keep Victorians safe – to do the serious, meticulously well-planned work that is taking machetes off the street – not kneejerk reactions that are just a dead cat strategy to divert from the internal battles of those opposite. Let us look at the episode that took place in Northland that apparently has prompted this motion this morning, where young people were arrested for possessing and using a controlled weapon, where they are on remand for doing so and where it is already illegal to do what was done. I am not going to pre-empt that legal and judicial process, but it is worth recalling that those who perpetrated, or who have been alleged to have perpetrated, the horrific episode on Sunday are currently behind bars and in custody.

I also, as the member for Preston did, acknowledge the retail workers who put themselves at risk to keep those around them safe. They are in many respects on the front line, and it is the work that we are doing here that is important to keep them safe as well. But on the police advice to us – the member for Malvern, the Shadow Attorney-General, talked about police advice – it is not the role of government to countermand or counteract police advice. We do not want people randomly turning up with malicious, aggressive weapons, with machetes and swords and so forth, in an uncontrolled way at police stations. That does not keep frontline police officers safe. So it is not our role to counteract the advice we have been given from police. Instead we want to keep police who are at stations like Broadmeadows and Craigieburn safe.

We also want to avoid unintended consequences, and that is why we are doing the work of government, not kneejerk responses and putting in motions of a Wednesday morning. I note for example that today is Everest Day. It is a day of very great significance for our Nepali population, many of whom will be coming into the Parliament today. Many members of that community have family members who served the Commonwealth with distinction in the Second World War, in the Gurkha regiments. Many of them have what might be construed, if legislation is not properly drafted, as aggressive weapons or machetes in the form of Gurkha knives. I do not want legislation that criminalises the Nepali community in Greenvale for having things which are of particular significance to them and their families. Those opposite, I know, like many across the house, will be going as well to Kokoda in the mid-year break, walking the Kokoda Trail. Many people, including my own family, have legacy items from having fought in New Guinea during the war, including machetes which were used for clearing the track and so forth. I do not want them to be criminalised because of ill-considered kneejerk legislation.

I do want to keep my community safe; it is the paramount priority that I think all of us have in this place. Those opposite have sought to suggest it is their exclusive remit. It is not true. Doing this well and doing it properly is why we are banning the sale of machetes today. It is why the ban in its entirety will come into effect in September, well in advance of the timetable that other jurisdictions have sought to do, because it is important that illegitimate, illegal weapons are off the streets. But it is also important to avoid criminalising those who are not engaging in dangerous behaviour or who do have a reason

for maintaining things like family heirlooms, whether it is a Gurkha knife or a machete from Kokoda, to use just a couple of examples.

We do need to take the risk of unintended consequences seriously while also prioritising community safety at every turn. Those opposite can engage in that kind of vein-throbbing over-the-top performative gesture, but what matters is making policy that works and that is going to keep communities safe, that is going to get machetes off the streets and that is not just about diverting from their own disunity but actually does have the effect –

**Annabelle Cleeland** interjected.

**Iwan WALTERS:** The member for Euroa constantly interjects but very rarely gives a speech of her own accord. But Tim Tully of Victoria Police today talked about the importance of doing this work, saying anything we can do to choke the supply and flow of machetes onto the streets is a step in the right direction, talking about the work that this government is doing. The member for Euroa talks about what the police are wanting. I have just quoted that to her; maybe she can use that in a contribution of her own later. So I revert to the paramount importance of community safety: it is why this considered legislation and why the considered work of this government matters and why I oppose this motion.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (09:53): We must move to debate this legislation today. This is about community safety, and this is not, as the member for Greenvale says, a kneejerk reaction. This is something that we have been calling for for 18 months straight – 18 months, time and again. This will be the fifth time that we have brought this to this Parliament to keep our community safe. And why – because of the outrage of Victorians and because of these machetes on our streets. It is because of people who are suffering at the hands of these machetes being allowed in our streets because the government has been weak. The government has been weak to act, slow to act and slow to move on this, so today we must we act on this. Today it is urgent, and we are moving this legislation again for the fifth time in this house, not as a kneejerk reaction. But I can tell you what was a kneejerk reaction. It was on Sunday night the Premier and Minister for Police coming out and saying, ‘No, we won’t bring anything forward. No, we won’t make this any more urgent. No, we won’t do it.’ And then all of a sudden there was a big backflip on Monday once the public outrage was there because of the tragic scenes at Northland shopping centre. All of a sudden: ‘It is urgent. We will ban the sale of machetes. You know what, we will actually do something about it.’

Then what happens is that the retailers report that there is a spike in the sale of machetes. In that time, in that delay, in that drag out, there is a spike in the sale of machetes. We have retailers reporting that they are selling them at a discounted rate because they are trying to get rid of them. They are selling them at a discounted rate, so arguably there are actually more machetes on our streets because the government has failed to act, because the government has delayed and because the government has played politics with Victorians’ safety. So we are here today trying to introduce this bill, trying to do this and keep Victoria safe for the fifth time over in 18 months, because we want to make sure that Victorians feel safe on our streets.

I want to read to you something from a local in my community. This has been a serious and real issue. Community safety in my electorate has been so real. I have had locals writing in to me about break-ins in their house where there was a specific local, a 14-year-old, who was alone at home when armed invaders entered the house. Can you imagine the terror for those parents? Then there were, as was reported:

Earlier alleged victims of a teen accused of going on to murder Doncaster doctor Ash Gordon while out on bail ...

This 16-year-old – this is from the *Herald Sun* and this is from a local that wrote to me:

They accused the state government of having “blood on its hands” because in their view the teen should not have been bailed –

this is a teen with a machete –

after he was accused of being involved in the aggravated burglary in October that led to a man suffering serious head injuries from a machete attack.

This teen with a machete was then out on bail – was bailed out. We are talking about young offenders in this state that are bailed in and out, in and out, 150 times over. Ninety minutes it takes them sometimes to be bailed and back on the streets offending again. One of these teens then went on to tragically murder Dr Ash Gordon in Doncaster. The member for Morwell knows this all too well. There have been 10,000 signatures that he has collated that have asked for stronger bail laws, and that speaks to the problem with this government that not only do they fail to act on machetes but they fail to strengthen bail laws. In March last year they weakened the bail laws that they sought to then reverse to make it better.

We are here debating this urgently today to stand up for the victims of crime, to stand up for Victorians and to make sure that they feel safe, because that is our job in this chamber. That is our job in this Parliament – to stand up for Victorians, to fight for people who do not have a voice in this place so that they can feel protected and they can feel safe. It is our job as legislators; it is our job as parliamentarians. To quote this particular victim of crime: the government has blood on their hands. About this tragic incident in Northland as well the locals are writing in to me. If I can close on this: a local wrote in to me whose elderly parents were at Northland. They have escaped from another country, migrated here for a safer future for their family and now feel terrified of living in Victoria, because they have moved here and then been in this situation where they have been separated from one another – one locked in a shop, one out in the car park with these violent offenders with machetes – because you have not acted.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (09:59): I rise to oppose this motion, but I would like to start off by saying that we do extend our sympathies to those who have been involved in the events at Northland and other events previously involving machetes. In fact any violent crime is always horrendous and horrific to see. It is indisputable that these have been terrible events, and the Premier herself has publicly condemned them and condemned them in this chamber – even just yesterday. We are listening as a government. Our job is to govern, and to do so takes prudence and it takes careful consideration. It means formulating legislation which does not end up with unintended consequences. There is a reason why this ban has not been rushed through. We have been able to stop the sale of machetes from retail, but the amnesty will commence from 1 September because amnesties cannot happen just overnight with the click of a finger.

Grabbing headlines and stunts like this are easy enough to do, but actually implementing real policy and doing the work takes consideration. It needs to be careful, and it needs to be done in consultation with those who have to actually effect the change, and that means Victoria Police. We have been working with Victoria Police to ensure that the amnesty will be done in a way that is safe for them. That is incredibly important, and those opposite have not even touched upon that. They have come in with fire and brimstone, and I can understand that things are a bit charged over there at the moment, but it seems to be that they think if you just say it and bring in a piece of paper, it happens overnight, magically. Well, it does not. It takes hard work. Governing is hard work, and that is what we are doing here.

The member for Malvern asked how we are going to go back to our electorates. I will actually say when I go back to my electorate that I made a decision to make sure that the way we were doing this was as careful as possible, and it was staged and not rushed.

**A member** interjected.

**Daniela DE MARTINO:** Exactly right. We are focused on listening to the advice of Victoria Police – and we just heard the member for Greenvalle quote VicPol's new commander Tim Tully, who said anything we can do to choke the supply and flow of machetes out onto the streets is a step in the

right direction. That has taken effect from today. Furthermore, the member for Greenvale brought in a couple of fine examples of unintended consequences of rushing through legislation of this nature. He spoke about the Gurkha knives, and he also spoke about World War II artefacts. There has to be careful consideration of these things lest people for some reason end up finding out that through unintended consequences they are now in breach of the law. When we enact policy, we make sure it is effective and it works well. That is precisely why we cannot rush through a bill that has been brought over from those opposite to try and distract from the other headlines affecting them today.

It is so important – and I know I have stated this already, but governing is not easy. It takes skill, it takes hard work and it takes careful and due consideration. There is no way that we would want to rush anything like this. Amnesties are not easy to enact. We are the first legislature in this country to ban machetes. The legislation has been passed. We are the first to do it, which means when we do it, we have got to get the map going forward for this, the planning, right. And hopefully – and it is up to other jurisdictions – others may then follow suit. But if we do this really well, they will be able to follow the way that we did it as well. In the UK it took them 18 months to effect this. We are doing it in less than that, a third of that time, and it is not four months, member for Malvern – just to let the member for Malvern know – it will be in three months time. So I do oppose this motion for the reasons that I have outlined today, and I hope that others will see sense and reason as well.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, we seek leave for the Premier to come in and talk on this, considering the media report now that, pending police advice, the Premier has revealed she is open to fast-tracking the Victorian machete ban from its start date in September.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. I encourage members to read the standing orders.

#### **Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (27):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

*Noes (51):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, 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, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

**Motion defeated.**

#### ***Business of the house***

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

**The SPEAKER (10:09):** General business, notices of motion 60 to 88 and order of the day 7, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

**Notices given.**

*Documents***Documents****Incorporated list as follows:****DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General:

The Orange Door: Follow-up – Ordered to be published

Work-related Violence in Government Schools – Ordered to be published

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – Chief Officer report 2023–24 under s 31 of the *Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004*

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Aboriginal Lands Act 1970* – SR 29

*Road Safety Act 1986* – SR 28

*Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* – SR 27

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 29.

*Bills***Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024***Council's amendments*

**The SPEAKER** (10:11): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024 with amendments.

**Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.**

*Motions***Motions by leave**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (10:11): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Hastings for reprehensibly voting in favour of doubling the emergency services tax on every home owner and increasing it by 150 per cent on farmers while hanging our hardworking volunteers out to dry.

**Leave refused.**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (10:11): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Bass for reprehensibly voting in favour of doubling the emergency services tax on every home owner and increasing it by 150 per cent on farmers while hanging our hardworking volunteers out to dry.

**Leave refused.**

**Wayne FARNHAM:** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for reprehensibly voting in favour of doubling the emergency services tax on every home owner in Pakenham and increasing it by 150 per cent on farmers while hanging our hardworking volunteers out to dry.

**Leave refused.**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (10:12): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Monbulk for reprehensibly voting in favour of doubling the emergency services tax on every home owner and renter and increasing it by 150 per cent on our farmers while hanging our hardworking emergency services volunteers out to dry.

**Leave refused.**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (10:13): I move, by leave:

That the house condemns the Premier and the member for Ripon for reprehensibly voting in favour of doubling the emergency services tax on every home owner and increasing it by 150 per cent on farmers while hanging our hardworking volunteers out to dry.

**Leave refused.**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (10:13): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Melton for reprehensibly voting in favour of doubling the emergency services tax on every home owner and increasing it by 150 per cent on farmers while hanging our hardworking volunteers out to dry.

**Leave refused.**

**Nicole WERNER**: I move, by leave:

That the house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that aggravated burglaries in Manningham have risen by 75 per cent and every day the ban is delayed puts the residents of Warrandyte's lives at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (10:13): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that crime in Greater Shepparton has risen by 19.7 per cent and every day the ban is delayed puts the residents of Greater Shepparton's lives at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:14): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Yan Yean for reprehensibly voting in favour of doubling the emergency services tax on every home owner and increasing it by 150 per cent on farmers while hanging our hardworking emergency services volunteers out to dry.

**Leave refused.**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (10:14): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting for September, noting that the crime rate with weapons in Victoria continues to rise and that every day the ban is delayed puts all Victorians at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (10:15): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for delaying the machete ban until September and failing to keep the community safe, with crime rates rising in Glen Eira by 7 per cent and residents in Caulfield paying the price.

**Leave refused.**

**David SOUTHWICK**: I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Allan Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that crime in Port Phillip has risen by 13 per cent and every day the ban is delayed puts Victorians' lives at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (10:15): I move, by leave:

That this house condemn the Allan Labor government for delaying the machete ban until September and failing to keep the community safe, with theft from shops increasing by 223 per cent on the Surf Coast, increasing the cost of living for all members of Polwarth.

**Leave refused.**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (10:16): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for delaying the machete ban until September and failing to keep the community safe, with retail theft in Mildura up 19 per cent and the residents of Mildura paying the price.

**Leave refused.**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (10:16): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that aggravated burglaries have risen by 32 per cent in the electorate of Kew and every day the ban is delayed puts residents at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (10:16): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Allan Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that residential aggravated burglaries in Stonnington rose by 62 per cent in the past year and every day the ban is delayed puts the lives of residents of my Malvern electorate at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (10:17): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that crime in the Baw Baw shire has risen by 30 per cent and every day the ban is delayed puts the residents of Narracan's lives at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (10:17): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that crime in Latrobe has risen by 11.6 per cent, and every day the ban is delayed puts the residents of Morwell's lives at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Chris CREWTER** (Mornington) (10:17): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that crime in the Mornington Peninsula shire has risen by 28 per cent and every day the ban is delayed puts the lives of Mornington electorate residents at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that crime in Maroondah has risen by 13 per cent and every day the ban is delayed it puts the residents of Croydon's lives at risk.

**Leave refused.**



**David HODGETT:** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for delaying the machete ban until September and failing to keep the community safe, with crime rates rising in Knox by 14 per cent, and the residents in Bayswater are paying the price.

**Leave refused.**

**Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:19):** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for delaying the machete ban until September and failing to keep the community safe, with crime rates in Knox up by 14 per cent, and the residents of Rowville are now paying the price.

**Leave refused.**

**Kim WELLS:** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for delaying the machete ban until September and failing to keep the community safe, with the crime rate in Monash up by 10 per cent, and every day the ban is delayed puts the residents of Mulgrave at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (10:19):** I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that crime in Stonnington has risen by 15 per cent and every day the ban is delayed puts the lives of the people of Prahran and residents at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (10:20):** I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that crime in Frankston city has also risen by 16 per cent and every day the ban is delayed puts the lives of Frankston city and surrounds residents at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:20):** I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that crime has risen by 36 per cent in the Mitchell shire, 11 per cent in Benalla, 37 per cent in Strathbogie, 20 per cent in Greater Shepparton, 19 per cent in Bendigo and 9 per cent in Campaspe and every day the ban is delayed puts the residents of the Euroa electorate's lives at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:21):** I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Allan Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that residential aggravated burglaries in the Yarra Ranges have risen by 158 per cent and every day the ban is delayed puts the residents of my electorate of Evelyn at risk.

**Leave refused.**

**John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:21):** I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Allan Labor government to immediately bring forward the machete ban rather than waiting until September, noting that residential aggravated burglaries in Boroondara have risen by 32 per cent and every day the ban is delayed puts the lives of the people of my electorate of Hawthorn at risk.

**Leave refused.**

*Business of the house***Adjournment**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:22): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 17 June 2025.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements***Carrum electorate office work experience students**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:22): I recently had the pleasure of hosting two outstanding year 10 work experience students: Jackson Bonica-Malone from Patterson River Secondary College and Ewan Dunster from Mordialloc College. Spending time with them and discussing their perspectives was truly enlightening, and I was particularly impressed by their social awareness. Jackson and Ewan, you are remarkable young individuals, and I wish you both the very best in your future studies.

**National Volunteer Week**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:22): Last week marked National Volunteer Week, celebrating the vital role of volunteers in connecting and strengthening our communities. A heartfelt thankyou goes to all the volunteers in Carrum. Your dedication across sports, cultural and community groups truly makes a difference. There are so many opportunities to volunteer in our clubs and organisations. If you are thinking of volunteering, think about your kids' footy, netball, soccer and other sports clubs; our lifesaving clubs; fire brigades and SES; RSLs; neighbourhood houses; and school councils. Every contribution counts, and the rewards of volunteering are immense.

**Amma's Melbourne Ashram**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:23): Recently I was so delighted to join Amma's Melbourne Ashram in Carrum Downs for the inauguration of their new Amrita Hall and Cafe. My heartfelt thanks go out to Raja Manikanddan, Mani Kalimuthu, Nava Subramaniam and the ashram's committee and ensemble of beautiful volunteers, not just for a wonderful celebration but for their continuing generosity and support for our wonderful local community.

**Gippsland South electorate awards**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (10:23): Gippsland is blessed to have some of the best pubs, clubs and restaurants in the state. It was officially confirmed at the Australian Hotels Association Awards for Excellence last week. In Gippsland South there were big winners, notably the Star Hotel, taking home Parma of the Year – a big, big boon for owners Jeremy and Tori Green and head chef Adam Jackson, who celebrated the win in style. I invite all members and all Victorians to get down to the Star and sample the best parma. I know the Parma of the Year was a big win last year for the Middle pub in Korumburra. This year Ben and Elyse Fisher and their team took out Best Non-alcoholic Beverage Menu, while other finalists from my electorate included wonderful small local pubs like the Poowong Hotel, the Welshpool Hotel and the Rusty Gurnard at Port Welshpool. The Tinamba Hotel took out the regional Best Pub Restaurant and young Sale chef Quinn Jacobs was named Apprentice of the Year. Traralgon's Crown Hotel took out best overall regional pub, and the Grand Junction was another winner.

Gippsland is also kicking goals in sport – pun intended – with two Sale winners at the recent Victorian Sport Awards. Congratulations to Sale United women's coach Madelaine Breakspear, who was named

Community Coach of the Year – an outstanding achievement. Maddi coached the Swans to both the Latrobe Valley Soccer League championship and cup last year and also coaches the LVSL under-18 rep team. Sale cricket umpire Peter Boulter was named Community Official of the Year for his contribution across multiple competitions. Finally, at the Victorian Community Tennis Awards Sale Tennis Club was honoured with the Most Outstanding Inclusion Initiative for its PALM workers program, getting visiting Pacific Island workers into tennis.

#### **Australia's Biggest Morning Tea**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:25): It has been a really busy week across the Williamstown electorate, and I want to congratulate a few really amazing people who have gone above and beyond to raise money for the Cancer Council through a couple of those Biggest Morning Teas. Firstly, Point Gellibrand Rotary Club held a wonderful event at the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria in Williamstown, and thank you to all who helped organise that event. A special shout-out to Pam Barnes, the secretary, and Angela Altair for MCing the event. Secondly, Michelle Cassar from Aligned Corporate Residences organised another morning tea at Pelicans Landing, which Rosemary Angyasy, president of the Williamstown traders association, MCed with aplomb. Congratulations to you all.

#### **West Gate Neighbourhood Fund**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:26): Walker Close Community Centre, the recipient of a \$9000 grant from the West Gate Neighbourhood Fund, developed a number of workshops with a coral reef theme based on crochet in conjunction with Spotswood Primary School, and that has transformed the Louis Joel Arts and Community Centre into a magical underwater garden with crochet and artwork. It is beautiful. Congratulations to Jill Bilston, Robyn Law, Tricia Salau and Jackie Green.

#### **Altona North Soccer Club**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:26): It was really hard to get the grins off Altona North Soccer Club faces as I shared the good news out of the budget that there will be \$100,000 to help plan the redevelopment of their facility at DN Duane Reserve, which they have well and truly grown beyond.

#### **AW Langshaw Reserve**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:26): Finally, deputy mayor Rayane Hawli and I got to switch on the new lights at AW Langshaw Reserve. And although Newport footy club did not get the win they wanted, Altona Vikings did.

#### **Housing affordability**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (10:27): I rise today to highlight the Victorian Liberals' and Nationals' bold and future-focused commitment to abolishing stamp duty for first home buyers on all properties valued up to \$1 million, whether those homes be newly built, off the plan or existing dwellings. This policy addresses a harsh reality that under the Labor government the dream of home ownership has become a nightmare for too many young Victorians. Stamp duty in Victoria is one of the most punishing taxes in the country, and on a \$750,000 home a first home buyer must fork out nearly \$40,000 before even receiving the keys. This is not fair, it is not sustainable and it is holding people back. Our plan scraps that burden entirely. First home buyers will pay zero stamp duty, offering savings of up to \$55,000. It is a decisive move to restore fairness, encourage aspiration and unlock the door to home ownership. Independent modelling by the Parliamentary Budget Office confirms the policy could deliver relief for 17,000 Victorians in its first full year. Industry experts like the Property Council Australia have praised the reform as a 'housing supply heart-starter'. Meanwhile, this Labor

government has introduced 61 new or increased taxes in just 10 years, with 30 of them being on property. The Liberals and Nationals will cut taxes, reward hard work and help Victorians get ahead by growing Victoria once again.

### **Carol Weller**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:28): I rise today to honour the life of Carol Weller, a lifelong advocate for fairness, compassion and the values of the Labor Party. Carol was a single mother at a time when this was often stigmatised. As a single mum, she returned to work to support her family independently, a bold act in an era when many women lacked options, working in aged care and textiles. Her courage extended to immigrating to Australia, where she built a purposeful life surrounded by friends and family and her meaningful work. Beyond her family, Carol's passions ranged from animal welfare – she once famously adopted a donkey – to art, music and history. Carol joined the Watsonia branch of the Labor Party in 1983, inspired by Bob Hawke and local Labor leaders like John Cain. She became a fixture of election campaigns, always on the front line with a sign, leaflets and an unshakeable belief in the power of democratic participation. She proudly supported local campaigns for John Cain, Peter Staples, Jenny Macklin, Kate Thwaites and me. I remember Carol's selfless commitment as a volunteer at Watsonia Primary School, which ran what they called a grandparents program, utilising wonderful retirees like Carol to help support students with reading, maths and other tasks. Carol passed away on 1 April this year at the age of 89. She was cremated with her ALP life membership badge pinned proudly to her chest. Carol was a true believer. May her legacy continue to inspire for generations to come.

### **Maroondah Hospital**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (10:29): Today I want to take you back to a time in September 2022 when the Labor government promised a billion dollars as an election commitment to rebuild and refurbish the Maroondah Hospital from the ground up. Fast forward to today, and after years of consistent advocacy, including raising numerous members statements, adjournments, constituency questions and even tabling a petition here in the house, do we finally see a small step in the right direction with some shared funding listed in this year's state budget?

However, with the exact amount for Maroondah Hospital undisclosed, we must question how much of that billion-dollar commitment we will see come to light and when construction will finally begin. Doubts have also been raised over whether we will even see the promised rebuild or if instead it will be a relocation, with the new hospital built elsewhere. With the budget papers only listing the vague 'Melbourne East', will the hospital still be built in Ringwood East? Or are the rumours true – does the Labor government plan to relocate and build the new hospital in Wantirna? I will continue to be a relentless voice to ensure our community has access to the infrastructure and facilities to support the demands of the growing population and healthcare needs. Rebuild the Maroondah Hospital in Maroondah.

### **National Volunteer Week**

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:31): Last week was National Volunteer Week, and it was a great opportunity to recognise and celebrate our terrific volunteers. I thank and extend my appreciation to all the volunteers in the Kalkallo electorate. Victoria has one of the highest rates of volunteering in Australia. Last year 3.3 million Victorians volunteered, collectively contributing 730 million hours to the community. Volunteers make a huge contribution to our community. They benefit personally from those efforts, and they meet some great people along the way. This year's theme for National Volunteer Week was 'Connecting communities', emphasising how volunteering can bring people together to face challenges and foster inclusive and thriving communities. In the Kalkallo electorate, we saw some fantastic initiatives to honour the week. Hume City Council lit up Broadmeadows town hall in red, held information sessions to help more people volunteer and celebrated local volunteers at

a recognition ceremony, which I know the member for Sunbury attended. Mitchell Shire Council also celebrated the week with grants for community groups towards events, activities, training and development, and transport. Thank you to my local councils for helping celebrate National Volunteer Week, but most importantly, thank you to all our volunteers, be they in our emergency services, community sports, neighbourhood houses, men's sheds, residents associations, schools, health care, food relief, for community groups, charities and not-for-profits, multicultural groups, seniors groups, animal rescue and foster carers. In almost every facet of our lives, much of this work could not be done without the selfless dedication of our amazing volunteers.

### **Wangaratta Citizen of the Year**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (10:32): A big shout-out to Peter and Wendy Lester, who were named Wangaratta citizens of the year back in January but this Sunday will celebrate their handprints being engraved on the Marmungun Rock at Apex Park in Wangaratta. This tradition was instigated by the late Uncle Wally Cooper, who was pivotal in this tradition that truly unites all cultures and is a fantastic celebration during reconciliation week. Wendy and Peter have contributed so much to the Wangaratta community, and we are grateful for their contribution. I look forward to witnessing this unveiling on Sunday.

### **Meadow Creek solar farm**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (10:33): Thank you to the many farmers and community members who showed up in Oxley last Thursday for the rally in the Valley. It takes a resilient community to keep turning up to show the Victorian government and the Minister for Planning that Meadow Creek solar factory is not the right project in that place. As the 10 June deadline looms for the final submissions, I encourage the entire Wangaratta community to have their say on this solar factory proposal. We are not anti solar, nor are we against renewable energy, but if we want to be truly sustainable as a region, we need to make better choices as to where these projects belong. Finding a willing seller who lives near a high-voltage line is not the best way to determine the best locations for these projects. The Conroy family have been at the heart of this fight for fairness. John and Jess and their beautiful children have been a pillar of strength for this community, and they have shown outstanding leadership qualities. As a former dairy farmer myself, I know the pressures that farming families are under right now. We will soon find out if the government genuinely wants to make the best decisions for our communities.

### **St Albans North Primary School**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:34): I rise to update the house on the recent visits that I have had to many schools in my electorate. One that I am very proud to have visited was St Albans North Primary School to meet the new principal, Cameron Black, and to announce the fantastic news that St Albans North Primary School is part of the \$10 million school capital works program for future planning. I was absolutely ecstatic to see the faces of the school community, in particular the principal and the teachers. I know how hard we have been working in the last 12 months to make this a reality. This will be a really important infrastructure program for the school. But most importantly, we know how important it is to have public education accessible to local families and for their kids. I want to thank Principal Black and the staff for hosting me, and I look forward to seeing these plans develop and to working with the school community.

### **Cairnlea bus services**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:35): On another matter, I am looking forward to welcoming the minister at the table, the Minister for Public and Active Transport, to Cairnlea to share the fantastic news that I cannot wait to announce to my locals, because I know that they are waiting for this news,

which is a new bus route in Cairnlea. This is something that the member for Kororoit and I have been working on, and it is wonderful to be able to deliver this important public transport infrastructure.

#### **Hampton Bayside Bowls Club**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:35): Two years ago Hampton Bayside Bowls Club faced insolvency, but our community stepped up to protect the club, which has since thrived. Only recently the club came from 23 points behind to win the regional grand final, which will see them move into division 2. This year the club celebrates their 75th anniversary. Congratulations to the club and their incredible chair Dr Kathy Walker.

#### **Harry Sampson**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:36): Congratulations to Harry Sampson on his recent Bayside council award for his contribution to Hampton East Brighton Football Club. Harry plays for the under-21s and runs the club's junior programs. He is heavily involved in the club's Goalkick program, including supporting young children. As president Stephen Brown proudly said, his 'dedication, initiative, and passion makes him a highly valued part of the Club'. Congratulations, Harry.

#### **NannyGranny**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:36): After needing help to keep family life in balance, Warren and Paige from my community created NannyGranny. NannyGranny is an online community that helps connect families with like-minded caregivers. As the couple says, the service connects the world's most experienced carers with those who need the most. Congratulations to Warren and Paige on the initiative.

#### **Hampton Rovers Football Club**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:36): The Hampton Rovers Football Club wear their hearts on their sleeves and are supported by an incredible group of volunteers. President Gary Nash is not only a champion in supporting them but in also supporting many wonderful social causes. The club are real community champions in every sense of the word.

#### **Brighton Secondary College**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:36): A very, very big welcome to Brighton Secondary College, who are in Parliament today.

#### **Dale Pitts**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:37): Congratulations and big thanks to Dale Pitts on his extraordinary 50 years of service in the Wattle Glen Fire Brigade. Dale joined the CFA in March 1975, quickly taking on many leadership roles, from comms officer in his first year to becoming first lieutenant and then in 1985 becoming captain. Over his 12 years as captain, the longest in the brigade, Dale led the brigade through significant changes, welcoming several female firefighters, including his wife Joy, and overseeing the transformation of the station which had been an old tin shed housing a worn Newton lean-to out the back. His leadership helped modernise the facility at Wattle Glen and its surrounds. They have evolved beyond community country roots, and it is fantastic to see the modern facility that is there today.

Dale's family have all been involved in the brigade: his wife Joy and children Elizabeth and Nathan were all registered firefighters until Elizabeth's and Nathan's careers took them from the area. I also want to give a call-out to Joy for her service. It is fantastic to note that there is actually a street named after them at the emergency management training centre facility in Ballan. Dale's active service and volunteerism took him beyond our community as a practical area drills operator at Fiskville and as a driving instructor for on- and off-road courses for CFA drivers, conducting 47 courses in his time there, and of course Joy helped him with that as well. He also conducted courses at the Department of

Sustainability and Environment with Parks Victoria and joined the district 14 headquarters, acting as an OH&S officer. I understand Dale played an important role in January 1998 with Nick Sturgess, regarding one of the largest fires Wattle Glen has ever seen for many years.

### Housing

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (10:38): I rise today to speak about the housing conversation I broadcast last week, an important conversation about Victoria's housing crisis. It is a crisis affecting the lives of real people every single day. I was joined by Major Brendan Nottle, the commanding officer of the Salvation Army; Cr Sarah McKenzie, the deputy mayor of the City of Yarra; and Rob Pradolin, executive director of Housing All Australians. Throughout the discussion one thing was painfully clear: the time for talking is over. This crisis demands urgent nonpartisan action.

Housing is not just a roof over someone's head; it is the foundation of health, dignity and security. Yet far too many Victorians wake up every day without a safe place to call home. As winter approaches, I urge everyone to remember those left out in the cold: our most vulnerable people living in fear and uncertainty. Our discussions explored real solutions, including the Housing First principle, an approach that ensures stable housing is the very first step in solving homelessness. When that piece of the puzzle is in place, so many other challenges become easier to address – employment opportunities improve, mental and physical health stabilise and social connections can be rebuilt. Simply put, housing is the critical foundation on which people can begin to rebuild their lives.

I thank my panellists for their dedication and insight. They showed that across industry, government and the community sector there is a shared commitment and willingness to work together to solve this crisis. Together we must fight to ensure every Victorian has a safe, affordable home, because everyone deserves that basic human right.

### Budget 2025–26

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (10:40): This year's budget was a win for Melton schools, our public transport network and the community. It saw Melton South Primary School receive a huge \$21.3 million to upgrade and modernise the school, with upgrades to the main classroom wing and historic old school. Kurunjang Secondary College are now progressing with a modernisation project of their own, with \$10.7 million allocated to construct new buildings for better learning spaces. Melton Primary, which is Melton's oldest school, will receive a share of \$10 million to plan for future school upgrades. The school plans to build a competition-grade gymnasium with sports courts and music spaces.

Another huge win for Melton was the new Thornhill Park bus service. This service will transport residents of Thornhill Park to Cobblebank station. This was an \$11 million investment into the Melton community, helping get people to the stations and around the local area. Melton South's FlexiRide service will also continue off the back of a \$4.9 million investment.

### Melton electorate businesses

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (10:41): I do not usually quote the *Herald Sun*, but after all the doom and gloom from those opposite on Victoria's business space they might want to check last Friday's edition. It turns out the sky did not fall in and business is booming. We are seeing new sole traders and contractors skyrocket, and it is the west leading the way. Melton takes the crown as the top local government area for business growth in Australia. Melton has seen a whopping 87 per cent increase in just five years. While Melton emerges as a business powerhouse, Wyndham is not far behind, followed by Casey and Hume. The west is not just growing, it is thriving, and Melton is proudly setting the pace for the rest of the nation within the business space.

### Drought

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (10:41): We had a couple of points of rain late last week on the border, with long-term forecasts not overly promising. The drought is a long way from over, and the rain has

come too late for any cropping. It has come too late for any meaningful growth of feed or for livestock. The only positive from that rain was that domestic water tanks will not be completely drained. The Towong shire in the Benambra district was recently included in the LGAs eligible for the government drought support package, and I do thank the Minister for Agriculture for receiving my approaches and for Towong's inclusion. I have also now written to the minister for neighbouring Indigo LGA for further consideration.

I have also called for some additional measures to be added to the package to deal with the here and now. As the package stands, it is a co-contribution for hay sheds and poly pipe up to about 5K from the farmer and \$5,000 from the government or the taxpayer. What our farmers need is financial assistance to buy and transport feed and fodder, and in some instances they need water. Farmers across the district are struggling. They are paying exorbitant transport costs, in many cases in excess of \$5500, just to bring fodder in from interstate. Some in the Rutherglen area are unable to differentiate between their cropping and grazing paddocks, as their properties have become dust bowls.

### **Budget 2025–26**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:43): I rise to celebrate the new investment that last week's budget made into Greenvale's schools, particularly Meadow Heights Primary School, a fantastic local school that serves our community with such dedication. I want to particularly thank acting principal Jacqui Lucas and recently retired principal Margaret Leach for their sustained advocacy and support of my advocacy on their behalf to ensure that we are able to provide funding to upgrade Meadow Heights Primary School, which is going to make such a positive difference to the learning environment and the play spaces that students at that wonderful school can enjoy, particularly at the community hub, where Salwa and the team provide such a welcoming environment for very often recently arrived migrant and refugee families in our community. This funding will help to open up that community hub and to open up Meadow Heights Primary School for community use and enjoyment, so I am really excited to see that new money in the budget. Similarly, there was new money for Greenvale Primary School to commence its planning process towards an upgrade. It just builds on the very significant investment that this government has made in new and upgraded schools across my electorate, whether it is Bethal Primary School, Mary Queen of Heaven, Aitken College, Kolbe Catholic College or of course the new Greenvale Secondary College, which opened this year.

### **Eid-ul-Adha**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:44): Before we resume in this place, Eid-ul-Adha will be celebrated by so many Muslims across my electorate of Greenvale and Victoria more broadly. The Feast of Sacrifice is a very special time for all Muslims. I wish them a happy Eid Mubarak.

### **Mildura electorate health services**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (10:44): While the Treasurer waxed lyrical about a so-called responsible budget and asked questions about what your favourite tax is, the people of Mildura have once again been left picking up the crumbs. There is no clarity yet on a long-promised Mildura-based public hospital master plan, although a render has magically appeared online. There is no investment in that hospital that the government has been so happy to claim back but refuses to invest in, and less money for our roads. Mildura deserves to be more than an afterthought.

### **Royal Flying Doctor Service**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (10:45): While this government has been sitting on its hands, the Mallee gets on with it. On Friday night the community came together in force for the inaugural Royal Flying Doctor Service Mallee ball. It was a spectacular evening supporting a service that delivers where the government too often falls short. The RFDS continues to be a lifeline for people across our region, providing essential health care, repatriation flights, primary care, GP clinics and community transport from Robinvale to Mildura and expanding.



I want to sincerely thank Dr Michael Ben-Meir and the entire team at RFDS Victoria, along with all the volunteers and sponsors who made the ball a success, including Rocky Giofrelle and Nathan Falvo, who have done an outstanding job and without whom this would never have happened. \$285,000 was raised through incredible support from our local food producers, agribusinesses and passionate locals. It is a powerful reminder that when government investment is lacking our community still shows up.

### **Warneet jetties**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (10:46): The signs around Warneet are a-changing: ‘Save’, ‘Saved’, ‘Build’, now ‘Building’ – two new jetties are a go. Big arm-wrap around Save the Warneet Jetties committee, Alex Stroud, Patricia, Mary, Gerry, Clem, Keith, Ian and Richard. They have been super passionate advocates over the years and have brought everyone along, so much so we committed \$9.3 million to rebuild north and south to the collective cheer of this coastal village and surrounds – completion timeline by the year’s end.

### **Coronet Bay Community Garden**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (10:46): The sunshine seeds grow and the community is nourished: Coronet Bay Community Garden, recently awarded a Tiny Towns grant, can get started on their new clubhouse and garden shelter. A joyful Saturday spent with president Margaret Deslandes. Members Georgie, Josette, Greg and Diana celebrated the news. Everyone was chuffed – it is a chunky amount perfect for their needs. In verdant surrounds we toasted with prosecco, and conversations abounded, delighted with the gifted fresh produce.

### **Wonthaggi Theatrical Group**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (10:47): It is *The Addams Family*; it is a mansion of mayhem. The Wonthaggi Theatrical Group show is imbued with haunting elegance, eccentric traditions, dark humour and more. The brilliant production team have excelled yet again. The cast oozes talent beyond expectations, and the live band – well, it is stellar symphonic. They captivate us: we are there; we are in the journey – wigs, make-up, props, costumes, eerie sets, the detail, the artistry. This is community; this is being mad about the arts. Proud parent, proud supporter – standing ovation to everyone involved.

### **Budget 2025–26**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (10:47): Eleven years ago this government made a commitment to the Victorian people to make Victoria the Education State. Tarneit has been a major beneficiary of this commitment, and this budget continues to deliver on this commitment. In this year’s budget this government, the Allan Labor government, has provided almost \$85 million to build the second stage of Brinbeal college right there in Tarneit. I would like to thank the school principal Simon Haber as well as the school leaders and the parents on the school council. It was only two years ago that the Minister for Education and I opened this absolutely fantastic educational precinct there in Tarneit, and we are furthering the fantastic infrastructure there, which is not just infrastructure for students but community infrastructure as well with the community hub at the back of the school.

What we are also doing is providing money to help plan the capital works upgrade at The Grange P–12 College Callistemon campus, which is the primary campus. About four years ago we provided \$10 million to upgrade the secondary campus there at Deloraine, which allowed this fantastic school to deliver a sports science program. I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that makes Victoria the Education State and cares about Victorian students and families.

### **Budget 2025–26**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (10:49): The Victorian state budget really delivered for our local sporting clubs this year, and I am particularly excited that Western Suburbs Soccer Club will be receiving \$70,000 in this year’s state budget to purchase and install a brand new electronic scoreboard at Ralph Reserve, something they have been asking me for for some time. This builds on previous commitments made by our government to sporting clubs in the Laverton electorate, including

\$300,000 for Truganina Thunder Football Club and also the \$85,000 we funded in last year's state budget for Sunshine Heights Cricket Club, whose brand new electronic scoreboard, I might mention, is now underway. Like these clubs, Western Suburbs Soccer Club is home to hundreds of dedicated locals from Sunshine West and beyond, some of whom have been involved in this club for many, many decades. They are a passionate bunch of westies who have been advocating for this scoreboard for many years now, since I have been elected as their local member, and I am so glad that this year we were finally able to deliver the funding.

Of course they are not the only club who will be benefiting from the state government investment. I am very pleased to see that Brimbank City Council is also going to receive \$300,000 from our government's Local Sports Infrastructure Fund for the redevelopment of Selwyn Park reserve in Albion, delivering much-needed upgrades for the tennis courts and providing additional hardcourts to allow for more sports to be played there. These two initiatives are great examples of how this government is delivering for folks in the Laverton electorate.

### **Budget 2025–26**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:50): It was hugs all around when I announced to principal Sue Holmes and assistant principal Jacqui Wiltshire that we are planning for future upgrades to their wonderful Sherbrooke Community School. This will be for new learning spaces, including a science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics space, better known as a STEAM facility. This lovely school is rich with great teachers and staff and fabulous students, and it is so deserving of this.

Our budget is also lighting up Monbulk Rangers Soccer Club, one of the state's biggest soccer facilities and the only one across the Dandenong Ranges, with \$200,000 towards upgrading their lighting. The old halogen lights are obsolete and cost a fortune to run, and this lighting upgrade is going to mean night matches and training after sunset will be more environmentally and financially sustainable for this great local club.

This year's budget has delivered for Monbulk, and I am delighted there will be also a package of \$150,000 towards making our CFA brigades and SES unit more resilient in times of disaster. This will include equipment to ensure that during severe weather events, when the power goes out and the phones go down, our volunteer emergency services will be able to keep the lights on and the telecoms working. It is a great win for our CFAs and SES, and I am thrilled it is in this year's budget.

### **Motor neurone disease**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:52): I just want to do a shout-out. It is Big Freeze time across Victoria. There are events happening across the hills. I have my beanie, and I hope everyone else out there is getting theirs too to support this fantastic cause. I am doing it in the name of my beautiful dear friend the member for Pakenham and everyone else fighting the beast.

### **Bills**

#### **Statute Law Revision Bill 2025**

##### *Statement of compatibility*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:53): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Charter), I table a statement of compatibility for the **Statute Law Revision Bill 2025** (Bill).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced in the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this Statement.

##### **Overview**

The Bill makes minor and technical amendments to a number of Acts.

In particular, the Bill:

- Corrects typographical, grammatical, numbering and section reference errors in the *Accident Compensation Act 1985*; *Administration and Probate Act 1958*; *Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012*; *Business Franchise (Petroleum Products) Act 1979*; *Caulfield Racecourse Reserve Act 2017*; *Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003*; *Child Employment Act 2003*; *Corrections Act 1986*; *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*; *Court Services Victoria Act 2014*; *Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018*; *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*; *Fisheries Act 1995*; *Health Complaints Act 2016*; *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022*; *Serious Offenders Act 2018*; *Status of Children Act 1974*; *Surveying Act 2004*; *Tobacco Act 1987*; *Transfer of Land Act 1958*; *Triple Zero Victoria Act 2023*; and the *Youth Justice Act 2024*.
- Updates references to the *Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975* (Cth) in a number of Acts, to reflect the fact that it has been repealed and replaced by the *Administrative Review Tribunal Act 2024* (Cth) by updating references to the former Act in the *Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Victoria) Act 1994*; *Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Act 1995*; *Corporations (Victoria) Act 1990*; *Federal Courts (State Jurisdiction) Act 1999*; *Gene Technology Act 2001*; *Marine (Domestic Commercial Vessel National Law Application) Act 2013*; *New Tax System Price Exploitation Code (Victoria) Act 1999*; *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2008*; *Sports Anti-doping Act 2005*; *Therapeutic Goods (Victoria) Act 2010*; and the *Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005*.
- Amends a number of Acts to correct references to names of departments that are out of date because of Orders made under the *Administrative Arrangements Act 1983*.
- Amends the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* to correct a reference to that Act being “the specified Act” for the purposes of the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986*, as the term defined in the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986* is “the special Act”.
- Amends the *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* to replace references to an Alpine Resort Management Board with references to Alpine Resorts Victoria, its successor in law, following the abolition of the Alpine Resort Management Boards by the *Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Act 2022*.

I consider that the amendments under the Bill do not engage any rights under the Charter.

**Hon Jacinta Allan MP**  
Premier

### *Second reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:53): 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 Bill before the House, the Statute Law Revision Bill 2025, is a regular mechanism for reviewing Victoria’s statute books and is required in order to ensure Victorian statutes remain clear, relevant and accurate.

The Bill makes minor and technical amendments to various Acts, including updating references and correcting typographical errors. This serves the broader purpose of ensuring these Acts remain relevant and accessible to the Victorian community.

The Bill:

- Corrects typographical, grammatical, numbering and section reference errors in the *Accident Compensation Act 1985*; *Administration and Probate Act 1958*; *Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012*; *Business Franchise (Petroleum Products) Act 1979*; *Caulfield Racecourse Reserve Act 2017*; *Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003*; *Child Employment Act 2003*; *Corrections Act 1986*; *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*; *Court Services Victoria Act 2014*; *Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018*; *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*; *Fisheries Act 1995*; *Health Complaints Act 2016*; *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022*; *Serious Offenders Act 2018*; *Status of Children Act 1974*; *Surveying Act 2004*; *Tobacco Act 1987*; *Transfer of Land Act 1958*; *Triple Zero Victoria Act 2023*; and the *Youth Justice Act 2024*.

- Updates references to the *Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975* (Cth) in a number of Acts, to reflect the fact that it has been repealed and replaced by the *Administrative Review Tribunal Act 2024* (Cth), by updating references to the former Act in the *Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Victoria) Act 1994*; *Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Act 1995*; *Corporations (Victoria) Act 1990*; *Federal Courts (State Jurisdiction) Act 1999*; *Gene Technology Act 2001*; *Marine (Domestic Commercial Vessel National Law Application) Act 2013*; *New Tax System Price Exploitation Code (Victoria) Act 1999*; *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2008*; *Sports Anti-doping Act 2005*; *Therapeutic Goods (Victoria) Act 2010*; and the *Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005*.
- Amends a number of Acts to correct references to names of departments that are out of date because of Orders made under the *Administrative Arrangements Act 1983*.
- Amends the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* to correct a reference to that Act being “the specified Act” for the purposes of the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986*, as the term defined in the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986* is “the special Act”.
- Amends the *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* to replace references to an Alpine Resort Management Board with references to Alpine Resorts Victoria, its successor in law, following the abolition of the Alpine Resort Management Boards by the *Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Act 2022*.

I commend the Bill to the House.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:53): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debated adjourned until Wednesday 11 June.**

### **State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025**

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:54): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025 on behalf of the coalition. In its substance, much of this bill is about technical changes – not just technical changes – to a number of tax-related bills, including the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007 and the Taxation Administration Act 1997, as well as others. But what this bill does not do is make any structural tax changes or substantially reduce the tax burden on Victorians.

We have been having a debate in Victoria about that burden. The recent budget highlighted the incredible burden of tax that is being placed upon the shoulders of every Victorian. When you look at the government’s strategy – I suppose if we use the word ‘strategy’ in the loosest possible terms – in their budget and in their most recent budgets, the underpinning of the revenue base for the government’s spending, their overspending, is taxing Victorians. Victorians now know that the tax burden is too great. Over the life of this government wages have gone up by an average of roughly 38 per cent and the tax burden has gone up by 183 per cent. The real winner in this state is the government through its massive, massive tax collection.

The government said before the budget, ‘We promise there will be no new tax increases – promise, promise, promise there’ll be no new tax increases.’ This was in the same week that they passed an emergency services levy that will rip \$3 billion from people over the forward estimates. This state tax bill, as I am led to believe, included the previously announced congestion levy. The government advised me that the congestion levy would be included in this bill, but because the government wanted to avoid the community’s deep, deep distress about the level of taxation imposed upon them, the government, as far as I am advised, removed the expansion of the congestion levy from the bill. In the next sitting weeks – I suspect the next sitting week or the one thereafter – we will see a congestion

levy bill. So much for the promise of no new taxes. We know that not only was the congestion levy announced and committed to but the budget included the increased revenue. The \$100 million of new revenue because of that new tax is in the budget. So the promise of no new tax is simply not true; it is included in the budget. All the government has tried to do, sneakily, is move the measure to impose that new tax from this bill and presumably to its own bill in a couple of weeks time, which just goes to show the duplicity. But I go back to the point: what this bill does not do is deal with structural issues in the tax system or the overburdening of tax upon every Victorian.

There is one thing this bill does do which the coalition has been calling on for some time, as has been publicly reported; this is not something that I am just saying. It has been publicly reported that the coalition has been saying over and over again that, on land tax, domestic violence victims should not be punished for fleeing because of domestic violence. The government has been sending bills, including, as has been reported, to one victim in Bayside for fleeing their home because of threats of violence. We had a domestic violence victim who received bills from this government – and threats if they did not pay – to pay land tax because they had been threatened with violence. How could that be?

For quite some time the coalition has been trying to get the government to take this issue seriously. I personally wrote to the Premier seven times. That was after writing to the Treasurer and that was after raising it with the minister; they obviously were constrained by the legislation as it was. But I wrote to the Premier seven times and said, 'We have to do something, Premier.' So I note that this bill does seek to do something for domestic violence victims in relation to land tax obligations – it is something. However, I do note that the amendment contained in the bill, as far as I am advised from the department, is not retrospective, so any of the victims who have been sent land tax bills because they have fled, up to when this bill is given royal assent, will not be helped. The government has said to me they will not be helped. This amendment will only be prospective. So we would say to the government: though we absolutely accept that after being dragged kicking and screaming on this issue there has been some attempt to do something in this bill, it will not fix the problem that exists for victims who have raised the issue to date, and that is concerning.

The other concern in relation to this particular measure is this measure has a number of requirements around it, as you would expect. When the measure is tested by the department as to whether or not an exemption exists, one of the tests is whether the person who flees from their property has earned a dollar or any more from that original principal place of residence, because if they have, they are not eligible for an exemption. This has been a very, very contentious issue, because what we are saying to victims, who we know often take a long time to leave the circumstance they are in and in almost all cases find it extremely difficult to find a new place to live – finding the next place to live, even if it is somewhere safe next, is a very, very difficult thing – is that if you earn a dollar on your primary place of residence you will not have access to redress. Just think this through logically – and when bills are drafted logic very rarely comes into it. What happens in many cases, and cases that I am aware of, is a victim leaves because of domestic violence, and they might have someone, for example, rent their property because they cannot afford the next place to live. They certainly cannot afford to pay for two properties – one they do not live in and the next place that they will live. But what these restrictions say is if there is one dollar earned on that original principal place of residence they are excluded from help.

I appreciate entirely that this is a very complex issue. I appreciate that it is a very difficult issue to resolve, especially with black-letter law. But to have a simple rule that says that if one dollar is earned on the original property a person cannot be exempt from a land tax obligation just does not make sense, because they may need to generate income to live once they flee. What we are saying with these amendments is the victim is now obliged to fund two properties. So if you leave, you are obliged to fund two properties. You are obliged to pay rent on your second property or however you choose to live in the property you flee to – you have obviously got to pay for that, you have got to keep it, you have got to pay all the bills associated with that – and then on the first property you will be land-taxed if you earn one dollar there. I just do not think it passes the logic test.

Of course we would have been open to having a conversation, because we were the ones proposing to close and to help resolve this issue, to work through a better pathway forward. Perhaps it could be by Treasurer's call; perhaps there could have been a circumstance where the Treasurer has the capacity to say there may be circumstances where someone leaves their principal place of residence and earns a dollar on the property to survive, to have a roof over their head. The Treasurer could make that determination, because they are complex issues, and as I have said, we accept that. But to simply say that if one dollar is earned they are no longer eligible for a domestic violence exemption to land tax is just wrong.

The other thing the government have neglected – and this has been raised with them many times – is that we are aware of circumstances where people have been forced to leave their homes because of natural disaster, and the government has chased the victims of natural disaster who are living in a second property while their first property is being repaired. We are not talking about people who are trying to fleece the system or do anything wrong; we are talking about people whose homes are either destroyed or partly destroyed. The government is saying that if you leave your property because of, in most recent cases, flooding – you are forced, you cannot live there – they are going to land-tax you on that property when you are living somewhere else. How can that be right?

When it comes to the domestic violence issue, we have led on pushing for this amendment, and we accept that, though not fully formed, there is an amendment here. But we have also raised the natural disaster concerns, and the government has said, 'Maybe we'll look at it another time.' Well, here is the bill right now. 'We'll look at it another time' – when? The government provided advice that there could be a state tax amendment bill later in the year. Well, there are currently victims – I have raised them in the chamber – who have been forced to leave their home because of flooding, and the government is trying to bill them for land tax because they have been flooded. It is not their fault there has been a natural disaster, and yet the government's response is, 'Maybe down the track we'll think about it.' It is not good enough. On the domestic violence issue, I would reiterate the calls we have made privately and make them publicly too: the government should consider whether or not the hard-and-fast rules around the measures are appropriate, because there will be circumstances where it is fair and reasonable for a dollar to be earned on the original property.

I am not in any way saying this is an easy issue, and it may need Treasurer's intervention. We may be talking only about a handful of cases each year, but I think it is only fair and reasonable for the Parliament, when considering this amendment, to think about whether or not this exemption properly covers the issues that need addressing. In the case that I have raised – not in detail, because of course we are talking about very, very difficult circumstances – these amendments will not solve that case for two reasons: (1) because of the hard-and-fast rules and (2) because it is not retrospective. So every case which has come to a member of Parliament where land tax is being charged to people because they have fled domestic violence will not be solved by this bill.

I say: why wouldn't we want to help the people who have already got the bill? Why would we want to help only people in the future? I think it would be reasonable to say this amendment solves a problem in the law. So why wouldn't we want to work out a way to help the people who are needing help, and why wouldn't we want to just make sure the details are right and make sure that amendment fully covers them? As I said, it also covers natural disaster, because we know there are cases, as I have said, where people are being charged land tax for being forced to move out of their homes while their houses have been either fully or partially destroyed, and that is just not right. It is just not right.

The other concern we have with the bill is that in the wording from the department there is a new measure that has been described as a tax. Now, I know the government promised no new taxes in this budget, but the measures in this bill include, in the government's own words, a 'penalty tax' measure. I have not included this new penalty tax measure in our 61 new taxes and charges. I think it would be fair to say we could, because the government has described it as a tax.

**A member** interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** This measure is new, member. This measure is new, and it has been described in the government's own briefing as a new 'penalty tax' measure. The government has described it that way. What the government is seeking to do through this measure is create a new penalty. I was not going to make a big point of it, but as I have been asked, I will have to refer to the government's own advice. The government is seeking to approve a new penalty tax measure that the State Revenue Office can impose, and what this penalty measure would do is allow the State Revenue Office to penalise people for not paying a bill, effectively. Currently they can impose a 25 per cent penalty tax, to use the government's words, or they can impose a 75 per cent tax, and this new measure would create a new penalty tax of 50 per cent. So it is a new measure, a new penalty tax – I do not want to misquote – as the government has described to me in writing.

I note that the State Revenue Office issued 15,405 assessments with a penalty tax in the last financial year. All of these were charged at the 25 per cent penalty rate – I suspect because the requirement of imposing a 75 per cent imposition through a tax penalty requires a very serious and egregious form of not paying your required bill. So far, the State Revenue Office has charged the 15,000 people a 25 per cent tax. If this bill were to pass, I suspect if we were to have a look at these figures next year we would see a good proportion of them move into this new 50 per cent penalty rate, because the new penalty rate test will be based on recklessness, which obviously has a common-law definition. I suspect what this will do is revenue-raise for the State Revenue Office through this mechanism and they will up the penalty provision, and presumably they have asked for it for that reason. They want a new penalty tax measure, so there is a new penalty tax in this budget in addition to the congestion levy measures, which are actually included in the budget revenue, and the coalition wholly does not support this new penalty tax measure. So under standing orders I advise the house of amendments to the bill and request that they be circulated.

#### **Amendments circulated under standing orders.**

**James NEWBURY:** The two amendments that we will move relate to natural disaster in the circumstance of land tax. A victim of a natural disaster should receive an exemption from land tax. It is not fair and reasonable that the government is land-taxing people who are forced to move from their homes because of natural disaster, so we are seeking to amend that in a similar way to the domestic violence provision, so it would be in addition to the domestic violence provision. Also we are seeking to strike out the 50 per cent new penalty tax, the new tax that the government has in this bill. Though, because they are technical amendments, we will not be voting on them in the lower house, I do make clear that these amendments will be moved in the upper house, and I suspect and would hope that members in the upper house who will have the opportunity to consider this will be able to say to the government: why is it that people who are being forced to flee their homes because of natural disaster are being land-taxed for it? How can the government possibly stand up and try and explain that natural disaster victims should be land-taxed because they have fled their either partially or fully damaged homes? How can that be the case? The amendments will seek to address that issue, as the amendments will also seek to address the new penalty tax provision in the bill.

Unfortunately we do not have the capacity, because the government does not consider bills in this way, to take these amendments to a vote in this place, because the government does not see fit to take any bill into consideration in detail, as it were, in this place, but in the upper house members across the entire chamber will have the opportunity to consider these issues in detail. Whether or not the upper house members consider a new tax fair and reasonable – and I will let that stand where it is – I do very much hope that the members in the upper house can look at the amendment that relates to natural disaster and say, 'Well, that's fair. That amendment is fair. We can't be taxing people because they're forced to flee their home because of natural disaster.' So I do hope that the members of the upper house can look at that fairly and reasonably.

There are a number of other technical changes in the bill. Many of them we have gone through in detail with the department, and they have estimated that they should be of no cost impact, so they genuinely are believed to be technical, and we can only take them on face value. We probably look at

any change in a taxation bill from the perspective of the government trying to find a way to close a loophole and make money, so the first question we often ask is: how much money are they estimating it will make? We take the department at their word that these technical changes will not do that. For example, there are some technical changes around the commercial and industrial property tax reform on qualifying use of land, and there are some changes around sale of trust property being moved between trusts where the owner remains the same, and we understand that in that circumstance there are no additional cost implications. There are some minor changes around unclaimed money and also around the Victorian conservation trust in terms of also providing money. With all of those things, we take the department at its word that it will not have anything other than technical changes.

I should note that the bill does make amendments to the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000, and I think it is important to recognise that yesterday the coalition committed to a game-changing policy to provide first home buyers with massive tax relief. If you are a first home buyer and you have not been able to get into the market – as we know, that is certainly the case, as less and less young people are able to get into the market – a future coalition government will wipe that stamp duty cost up to \$1 million. So up to \$1 million you will pay nothing. The government have been saying for the past day that they think more people will want it – good. The government have been saying more people are going to want this tax cut, and the answer to that is: good. What is interesting from this government is they are taking cheap shots about how many people want this policy, but I have not heard the Premier say she will match it. Where is the Premier? I have not heard the Premier say she will match it. I am happy for the Premier to tell Victorians every single day of the week how much people love this tax cut. Every single day the Premier and every minister can talk about this tax cut. You are welcome, ministry, to talk about this tax cut. You are welcome to talk about how many more people you think are going to take it up. You are welcome to underline the importance of it. Talk about it all day, every day. I want to talk about it.

Talk about our five tax cuts. Talk about our tax cuts every day – more than happy. On the first home buyer tax cut we are proposing, talk about it every single day. Do you know what the estimate was? It was that 17,000 people in a full year would take up that tax cut, and the government think it may be more – they think it may be 18,000. Fantastic, because it is young people getting into homes. For the government to say we are going to do nothing and we are going to take cheap little shots because they think people want it and we are going to do nothing – well, that just absolutely highlights the craven nature of this tax-loving government. Talk about the policy as much as the government wants. The difference is we will cut stamp duty for first home buyers significantly, which the government now says is going to be very, very, very, very popular and taken up. Fantastic – that is the goal. That is what we are trying to do. That is why we designed the policy. Yet what have we heard from the government? Nothing. Are they going to match us? No. Are they going to match the tax cut? No. The government and the Premier can talk about how much this policy is needed every single day of the week. I would love the Premier to talk about it every single day. The ministry can talk about it every single day, because it is true: people need it. That is why the policy is there. That is why we created it. That is why we announced it. At some point, do you know what is going to happen? At some point, do you know what the community is going to say? ‘Well, what about the government? What are they going to do? They’re talking about this policy and the need for it all the time. They’re talking about how popular it is going to be, but they are not agreeing to it.’ In terms of the bill, we are not opposing the bill. We will be moving the amendments that we will be moving, but we will not be opposing the bill.

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (11:24): I am really delighted to rise to speak in support of the amendments to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025, and I want to focus in on the measures around the meaningful financial relief for victim-survivors of family violence that are being delivered through these amendments. These are really practical steps that remove financial barriers and support recovery and safety for those impacted by family violence.



Starting with the first measure, which is in regard to land tax exemption, I want to highlight that this is an amendment that will exempt victim-survivors from paying land tax on their principal place of residence for up to six years if they have been forced to leave due to family violence and have not received income from the land. We know that fleeing family violence can be one of the most difficult and dangerous decisions a person can make, and it often comes with significant financial stress. Quite often, particularly for women leaving these situations, we find a myriad of financial complexities and quite frankly a huge mess that needs to be untangled in leaving that relationship. We have heard from victim-survivors who have fled their homes about the financial impact that family violence can have. This exemption recognises that no-one should be financially punished for escaping violence. It removes an unjust burden and offers relief during what is often the most precarious period of recovery.

By removing the land tax obligation during this time we are creating a fairer, more compassionate system that acknowledges the realities of rebuilding life after violence and responds with the dignity and support victim-survivors deserve. Of course we know that this bill comes into effect on 1 July, and those victims that are currently in this situation or have been in this situation can and have been supported by the current Treasurer and the previous Treasurer with *ex gratia* applications that have been made. Those financial liabilities have been alleviated and those people have been supported, and we will continue to do that till 1 July.

The second amendment allows victim-survivors to requalify for the first home owners grant provided they meet certain requirements, and this is a significant and empowering reform. This is about being able to rebuild lives. In many cases women have accessed a first home buyers grant jointly with a partner only to find themselves in a violent or unsafe situation and their first home has become a place of risk and not safety. Unfortunately, some women do not know the financial complexities that they have gotten themselves into or that their partners have put them in during the time of their partnership. Sometimes an application has been made without them being aware of that application happening for a first home owners grant or in fact a loan because of misleading and fake documents that were put in place during the time of that relationship. These changes that we are putting in place through these amendments allow those who have received any financial benefit from the original property to access the first home owners grant again, giving them a fair chance to start over. It means they can rebuild in a new location and receive the same support and tax relief as other first home buyers.

Together these reforms reflect our commitment and our community in removing barriers and supporting recovery for victim-survivors. Way too often there are, in particular, too many women that stay in relationships because of these complex financial arrangements that are in place, because of the fear of not being able to have a secure home if they were to leave. These are really important changes that underpin that support to be able to leave. We know that these amendments will build on the broader work we are doing to prevent family violence and to support those who are experiencing it.

We know that ending family violence cannot happen through one avenue only. That is why we invested \$92.8 million last year to strengthen women's safety, a package that we announced which brings together a joined-up, cross-portfolio response to drive real change. Under the women's safety package, which is the result of extensive conversations with victim-survivors and the sector, we are delivering the support needed across three key areas: firstly, immediate support for victim-survivors, secondly, delivering stronger justice responses to hold perpetrators to account, and thirdly, preventing violence before it starts. We are investing in case management and therapeutic support for victims and have given additional funding to the highest demand services, providing recovery and healing, particularly for children and young people. We have boosted funding to the personal safety initiative, making sure that women can access vital safety upgrades to their homes sooner. We are creating new justice navigator positions, a new pilot to provide tailored support for victim-survivors of sexual assault. We are boosting case management for people who use violence to keep them in view and on record. And led by the Attorney-General, we are strengthening family violence intervention orders to better protect victim-survivors.

I want to touch on the great work of Respect Victoria. Through Respect Victoria, Victoria's dedicated prevention of family violence agency, we are delivering the world-leading Ballarat saturation model, a first-of-its-kind initiative to embed prevention and early intervention right across the entire community. The Respect Victoria campaign What Kind of Man Do You Want to Be? has now reached over 1.6 million men over earlier months of this year, promoting healthy expressions of masculinity and really challenging those harmful norms. Some of that work was kicked off by the minister at the table beside me, the Minister for Emergency Services, and I thank her for her dedication.

Beyond the women's safety package, the 2025–26 state budget builds on providing for the prevention of family violence portfolio to the tune of \$123.2 million, which is to help keep women safe, keep children safe, hold perpetrators to account and support victim-survivors. The new initiatives through the budget will support the work of Respect Victoria to continue its statewide leadership media campaigns and innovative programs. It will continue to work with multicultural and faith-based organisations to deliver targeted family violence prevention and early intervention activities, because if we are not tackling prevention in this space, we are not doing our jobs.

We will continue to work to equip close to 400,000 workers with the tools to identify family violence through our multi-agency risk assessment and management program, which is the risk assessment tool that we use to inform our sharing of information around family violence and perpetrators. We will provide ongoing funding for statewide programs, and we will continue essential frontline services for people experiencing family violence and sexual assault. We are also funding an additional six crisis accommodation properties to support victim-survivors transitioning out of refuge and maintaining an intensive 24/7 outreach support for those in motels at critical risk. In addition to this vital work, our refuge system continues to expand. Once completed we will have capacity for 199 households a night, up from 170. We are also delivering up to 1000 new social housing properties specifically for victim-survivors through the Big Housing Build to ensure people have a pathway out of crisis.

With the 18 hubs and 19 access points in our Orange Door system across the state, we will continue to underpin and coordinate a response to family violence. This response is free, it is accessible and it is for people experiencing family and partner violence, bringing together specialist work and expertise from across the industry. They work specifically with Aboriginal agencies and men's services to make sure that victim-survivors do not have to navigate the system alone. At the Orange Door in Werribee we thank Westjustice for their work, who are running a restoring financial safety program and doing an excellent job there. Can I also thank the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance for their leadership in this work.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (11:34): I also rise today to speak on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025, a sprawling piece of legislation that tinkers with nearly every core taxation law we have in Victoria. The acts being amended include 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. It is quite a list, and if you were paying attention to the recent budget you will know why: the Allan Labor government never misses a chance to invent or expand a tax. It is their favourite lever, because heaven forbid they look at trimming bureaucratic bloat or reining in wasteful spending. As the many, many comments on social media have said recently, this government will tax us for breathing soon.

This bill on its surface makes a number of administrative and compliance changes. We are told it is about clarity and streamlining, but buried within these policies are real and often painful consequences for ordinary Victorians. Yes, it tightens enforcement by introducing a new penalty tax rate for reckless noncompliance, because the assumption again is that taxpayers must be doing something wrong. The most significant and perhaps well-intentioned part of this is the land tax exemption aimed at supporting victims of family violence. This is absolutely a step in the right direction, and any legislative action that helps people in crisis deserves credit. But there are some serious flaws. These changes will not apply retrospectively, which means countless victims navigating complicated tax debts – debts that

stem directly from abuse and trauma – will not receive the help they need. And if those individuals have had to lease their property just to survive, they are punished. The government has decided that receiving rent means you are no longer entitled to the exemption no matter your situation, and I think that is wrong.

In the Legal and Social Issues Committee's recent inquiry building the evidence base on people who use family violence we made 61 recommendations, and we need this government to act on those and not just tick a legislative box with incomplete solutions, because on the ground in my electorate the situation is dire. In Benalla, a town where the rate of family violence is 71 per cent higher than the state average, this government, the Allan Labor government, shut down the community services hub earlier this year and then had the audacity to gaslight my community and say that it never existed. The hub is gone, and the hub included 12 critical agencies like Beyond Housing, the Centre Against Violence and the Orange Door, and these were lifelines. We have communities like Euroa, Broadford, Seymour and Heathcote where services are virtually non-existent and demand is out of control. The land tax exemptions may look good on a press release, but they mean nothing if people in danger across the state cannot access the services that they need to begin with.

On the broader issue of land tax, in 2024 alone 1763 landowners in Mitchell shire were hit with these increases and nearly 500 in both Strathbogie and Benalla. These are not big landholders; these are people living on blocks they have worked for their whole lives, and many of them are being taxed incorrectly. In Avenel Matthew Trewin is still trying to convince the State Revenue Office that his land is primary production. He has done nothing wrong; he is just stuck in the gears of a broken system under the Allan Labor government. For the Giannarelli family of Seymour and David Russell in Benalla it is the same situation. David received a bill for land tax on the home he lives in. He sent rates notices, power bills and water bills proving it was his residence, and after months of waiting for the exemption to be confirmed the SRO sent debt collection letters. It was just heartless, and it is really pushing people to the brink. This is what happens when the Allan Labor government looks at Victorians like their own ATM and not people. And it gets worse: if you operate a small business from your home – a garage or a studio or a home office – you then lose your primary place of residence. If the home is held in a family trust, forget it – the system assumes you are a developer and not someone trying to run a business and pay the mortgage. It is out of step with how people live and work today, especially in regional areas, where mixed-use properties are a necessity and not a luxury.

This is not about fairness, this is about revenue, and it comes at a time when people in Kilmore, Broadford, Euroa and Benalla, as well as Seymour, are all at financial breaking point. Cost-of-living pressures are through the roof, fuel prices are up, power prices are skyrocketing and water charges are rising, and now families are getting land tax bills on top of all of this. Many are still trying to recover from floods, fires and droughts. I do want to acknowledge the member for Brighton's amendments and support him to allow an exemption from land tax for people who have experienced natural disasters. I know in my community people are still out of their homes and receiving land tax bills after enduring the October 2022 floods. It is heartless. We need to have some understanding about how these taxes impact everyday Victorians, and the government has to acknowledge that they need to be here to help, not hinder and certainly not hurt Victorians. This bill also amends the payroll tax, and again it is about compliance and not compassion. There is no relief here for small businesses, just more red tape.

While we are speaking about the relentless tax burden on our communities, I want to turn to one of the most pressing issues facing my electorate – facing families, businesses and communities – and that is the worsening drought conditions across central and north-east Victoria. I recently launched a petition to call on the Victorian government to formally declare drought across the region. In just one week I have had more than 5500 people sign that petition – most of them are farmers. They are proud, hardworking people who do not ask for handouts but are desperate for a fair go. They are running out of options. The paddocks are bare, our dams are dry, and the cost of transporting hay and water is astronomical. These are not poor-season stories; these are stories of desperation. I have stood with

families who have had to destock herds built over several generations. I have seen the emotional toll of watching crops fail again and again, and the sheer exhaustion of working 20-hour days just to stay afloat. They need breathing space. They need acknowledgement. They certainly do not need to be hit with an emergency services tax that quadruples their property rates overnight, and that is exactly what is happening.

While this government refuses to declare a drought, they have no issue with sending out the emergency services tax bill and treating productive farmland like it is a Melbourne development site. This is what I mean when I say you are punishing people who are already suffering. When a family's entire livelihood is tied to the land and the land gives them nothing back, the last thing they need is a tax notice in the mail charging them thousands of dollars to protect that land. It is gut-wrenching and it is unfair, and it is exactly why we are fighting for a drought declaration, not just for the emotional and moral recognition but because it could provide the key to real and practical relief. In some cases this drought declaration can allow us to access emergency grants, low-interest loans and rebates. But most importantly, it is an exemption from this brutal emergency services and volunteers tax. This levy is not about services, it is about revenue. It is about filling Labor's budget black hole. If this government genuinely want to support regional communities, then they should start by acknowledging the drought right in front of them. By doing so, it might make some of their tax grabs a little harder to justify.

The Allan Labor government cannot ignore the 5500 small business owners, residents and farmers who are asking and begging for some support. Do not pretend the conditions are not that bad. We are on our knees in regional Victoria. I do support the member for Brighton's amendment to allow the exemption from land tax for people who have experienced natural disasters. We are sick of being the cash cow for the Allan Labor government, who cannot manage money. They cannot manage our emergency services, and regional Victorians, particularly farmers in my community, are paying the price.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (11:44): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. Once again I rise in this house and the other side are lecturing us on financial responsibility, economics and integrity while one of their former leaders, who sits in this house, is crowdfunding so he does not lose his house. It is unbelievable.

**A member** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: No, no, I do not need to get a new repertoire. I think it is pathetic, treating people like that, and I will not take lectures from people who cannot even read a bill about integrity and financial responsibility. What you are doing to that person is absolutely pathetic, and you should be ashamed.

On the bill, if I can just reset for a second and go back to the Shadow Treasurer's contribution, I would ask people in this house: should you pay your tax bill? I think everyone in this house – there might be a couple of outliers, but most people would say yes. Should you act with reasonable care in regard to your tax? I think most people would agree – yes. Should you not conduct yourself with intentional disregard to your tax obligations? I think most people would also agree with that, right? Well, the Shadow Treasurer I think is misleading the house, because he is a little bit confused by saying –

**Vicki Ward** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: He might be more than a little bit confused, member for Eltham, that a penalty tax is a new tax, because that is not the case. He is a little bit confused about the Taxation Administration Act 1997. So I will put it a little bit more simply for those in the house. It is a simple analogy; see if you can keep up. You are caught speeding in your car. You breach the Road Safety Act 1986, I think it is. You are breaking a law. There is no tax there. You are then fined for your breach of the road rules. You pay that fine, thereby accepting those points and admitting your fault. That is not a tax. But by the Shadow Treasurer's understanding in his contribution today, that is a new tax. So a speeding fine would be a new tax, because a penalty tax, which he was talking about in relation to

the Taxation Administration Act 1997, is an enforcement measure that deters noncompliance. If people comply with their tax obligations, as they legally should, penalty taxes would not apply. So this is not a new tax. This change encourages people to comply in the same way that other legislation includes penalties for noncompliance. I think most reasonable people in this house would agree that that is not a new tax.

The Taxation Administration Act 1997 currently imposes a base penalty rate of 25 per cent, being the standard rate, and 75 per cent where the Commissioner of State Revenue is satisfied that a default was due to intentional disregard of taxation law by the taxpayer. You will pay zero if the commissioner is satisfied that the taxpayer acted with reasonable care to comply with the taxation law or the default occurred because of circumstances beyond the control of the taxpayer, and the current penalty framework limits the commissioner's ability to respond proportionately to noncompliance across a range of severity. So it is not an introduction of a new tax. It is changing, and proportionately changing, a noncompliance framework. In these circumstances, a middle penalty tax rate of 50 per cent based on an objective test of recklessness will allow for greater flexibility in the penalty tax regime and assist in achieving more tailored and better outcomes for compliance. The State Revenue Office issued 15,405 assessments with penalty tax in the financial year that ended on 30 June 2024. All of those were at the 25 per cent penalty rate. I note that the Shadow Treasurer conveniently did not explain this, and from what I was hearing, he was trying to tell the people of Victoria and the people in this house that a penalty tax is a new tax. That is just not the case, and I think that is confusing the issue. It is a very, very long bow to draw.

Member for Euroa, I have been here long enough not to tolerate being lectured about family violence by those opposite. I was in the house when we introduced the Royal Commission into Family Violence. I was in the house when a member in the other place David Davis called it a 'lawyer's picnic'. I was in the house when one member in this house at the time refused to stand for family violence victim-survivor Rosie Batty. So I will not be lectured by people on that side of the house about how we could be doing things that we are not doing for those victim-survivors.

Again, it seems a little bit confusing. We heard the Shadow Treasurer shout across the table to the minister that the Treasurer has never, ever used extraordinary powers to grant ex gratia exemptions for victim-survivors, and that is just not the case. The Treasurer has the power to grant those ex gratia exemptions to family violence victim-survivors who we think have a retrospective issue with their land tax. They have been used before, and I am sure they will be used again.

This bill also allows victim-survivors to requalify for the first home buyers benefits if they meet the criteria. That is something that I stand by. It is amazing. I have heard people come to my office and ask why they cannot do that. They believe it is unfair, and I have got to say I agree with them, so I am glad that this is in the bill.

The bill also supports the availability of long-term residential alternatives for renters. It clarifies that a minimum three-year rental lease must be genuinely offered to a renter in a build-to-rent development in order for that development to receive significant tax benefits, and if a renter chooses a short-term lease, a declaration must be jointly signed by the BTR provider and renter to show that a minimum three-year lease term was genuinely offered. The bill also prohibits rental terms of less than 12 months being used in BTR developments eligible for tax benefits.

There are also a number of other significant amendments in this bill, one being the unclaimed money amendments. They detail that if a person or entity is legally owed funds that cannot be located, they may have unclaimed money. The bill empowers the registrar of unclaimed money to recover unclaimed money paid to a person who is not the genuine owner. The bill also allows the registrar to pay unclaimed money to a subsequent genuine claimant even if a claimant has already been paid. We have the extension of the off-the-plan temporary duty concession, which has been spoken about by former speakers. The temporary off-the-plan duty concession will be extended for a further 12 months

to 21 October 2026. The concession, first announced in October 2024, allows outstanding construction and refurbishment costs to be deducted when determining how much stamp duty is owed.

If I go back to those family violence tax relief measures for a second, just to clarify so there is no confusion, the bill introduces tax relief measures under the Land Tax Act 2005, the Duties Act 2000 and the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000 to support victim-survivors of family violence. Under the Land Tax Act 2005 these measures will mean victim-survivors of family violence do not have to pay land tax in relation to their principal place of residence for up to six years if they have left their principal place of residence due to family violence and have not received income from the land. I will just also clarify that the Treasurer does have the power to grant *ex gratia* exemptions. Under the FHOGHBS act and the Duties Act the measures will allow victim-survivors of family violence to requalify for that first home buyer benefit as well if they meet certain requirements.

Once again, I point members, especially those opposite, to have a look at what some of their members have said historically and the actions some of their members have taken historically as well. We hear members on the other side of the chamber talking about royal commissions and inquiries. It is very important that some of the new members go back – maybe do a Google search, maybe look through *Hansard* – and see what the position of their opposition was at the time, what some of the shadow ministers said and what some of the upper house members said about some of these things. It is one thing to come here acting like butter would not melt in your mouth, but we on this side of the house know what actually happened. We have seen the actions, we have seen the protests, we have seen those statements like ‘A royal commission into family violence is a lawyers picnic.’ I will not sit here today and hear people telling us that we have not done enough when they have been opposed to some of these changes, whether it be the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System or the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Your actions speak louder than your words. Know your history. Do not lecture us on things that you have no foundation of evidence to be making statements on. I commend this bill to the house.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (11:54): The State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025 seeks to amend a number of acts in relation to taxation and increasing revenue for the state, as well as changing the tax treatments for some Victorians. I would like to first address some of the positive aspects of the bill and then address that tax revenue under this Labor government will increase to record proportions.

The changes to the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000 and the Land Tax Act 2005 will exempt the victims of family violence from being required to pay various taxes and charges as a result of finding themselves in situations where their safety is at risk as a result of family violence. This is something that the Victorian Liberals and Nationals opposition has been calling for, recognising that victims of family violence need all the support that they can get – all the support and assistance that governments are able to provide. Sadly, I have had constituents who have come into my office or phoned my office pleading for help to find urgent crisis accommodation who are sleeping in their car with their children. It is a confronting situation, and these constituents are finding themselves in these situations through no fault of their own. It is devastating for them and their family, who have had the courage to flee family violence. Usually these are victims of an abusive partner where there has been gambling or drug addiction or something else that has caused significant distress for them and these relationships have broken down, and it is truly heartbreaking to see. I sincerely do hope that the changes in this legislation, these measures, will go some way to helping these family violence victims and provide them with the assistance that they need when they need it, to help them have a fresh start. We commend those changes.

Now I turn to how this Labor government will be taxing Victorians to oblivion under this budget – absolutely taxing Victorians more. In the 2025–26 period, this financial year, Victorians will be forced to pay an incredible \$41.7 billion in tax by this tired Labor government. That is \$2.5 billion more than last year. This will make Victoria the highest taxed state in the country. This Labor government is just obsessed with tax, and when this Labor government runs out of money it comes after the pockets of

hardworking Victorians. Under this tired Labor government Victorians have been forced to pay more than 60 new or increased taxes in the last 10 years. I am sure that there are some Labor members of the Parliament that will remember the former Premier Daniel Andrews, who stood before all Victorians on live television on the eve of the 2014 election and promised that the Labor government would not introduce any new taxes – a promise broken, with more than 60 new or increased taxes under this Labor government. In comparison, back in 2014 Victoria's tax revenue was only \$18.6 billion. Since 2014, taxes have increased by a staggering 173 per cent. This is an extraordinary increase. It is massively contributing to Victorians' cost of living at the moment. Victoria is in a cost-of-living crisis. Families are struggling, and the increase in tax is really hurting. I mean, the \$41.7 billion of taxes that this Labor government will take from Victorians this year equates to nudging on \$6000, on average, per Victorian. It is a massive tax burden on Victorians.

In recent weeks we have seen how completely out of touch Labor's Treasurer Jaclyn Symes is with ordinary Victorians. When the Treasurer was asked about the increased taxes Victorians were being forced to pay, the Treasurer's response was that Victorians could afford to pay more. This gives you the clearest indication and the clearest insight into how Labor thinks. They do not care about families struggling with higher grocery prices and increased power bills. They just think that Victorians can afford to pay more tax. The day before the budget the Treasurer said:

There is nothing in the budget that changes the tax settings tomorrow.

Either the Treasurer had not read her own budget papers or she was deliberately misleading Victorian families. Not only are existing taxes increased under this budget, but there is a brand new tax that was introduced, being the emergency services levy. This is a new tax that will cost Victorians an extra \$3 billion over the forward estimates. To suggest that there were no changes to the tax settings under this budget just demonstrates how completely disingenuous this tired Labor government has become. Labor's Treasurer then also remarked, when referring to the massive increase in taxes, that:

... unlike WA who can literally dig money out of the ground, in Victoria, we have limited ability to raise revenue ...

This Treasurer Jaclyn Symes clearly has no idea, because the reason why the state of Victoria cannot raise any additional revenue in this way is because this Labor government keeps shutting down industries as a part of its extreme left alliance with the Greens. Does anyone remember? I am sure that they do. Particularly my friend the member for Eildon will remember our magnificent timber industry. In 2019 around 29,000 Victorians were employed in the timber industry, and it was an industry that contributed around \$1.5 billion to the Victorian economy. But this Labor government ganged up with the Greens to decimate the Victorian timber industry and put thousands of Victorians out of work – cut down our timber workers. Labor put a \$2 billion hole in our economy, and yet they now somehow complain that other states can make money more easily out of industries than we can.

Then this week the Treasurer thought that she would try and crack some jokes. She thought she would try and crack some jokes at a business forum, where she asked the audience: which is your favourite tax? What an absolute disgrace. How out of touch is Labor? How out of touch is Labor's Treasurer? No wonder Labor has lost Victorians' trust.

Next year Victorian employers will be forced to pay \$6.9 billion in payroll taxes, an increase of \$354 million. In addition, the budget papers predict that payroll tax receipts will increase by 4.9 per cent a year over the forward estimates to \$11 billion by 2029. This is a tax on workers. The higher the tax burden is for business, the less people they can employ. No wonder the Australian Industry Group said that increasing taxes will continue to drive businesses out of Victoria to Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales.

On top of this job-destroying payroll tax, Victorian employers are also forced to pay a COVID debt levy. Even though the COVID pandemic finished back in 2021, this Labor government is forcing Victorian employers to pay its COVID debt levy for another eight years, until 2033. In 2025–26

Victorian employers will be forced to pay \$1.1 billion under the COVID debt levy, and to add insult to injury, the budget papers predict the COVID debt levy will increase by 5.9 per cent each and every year over the forward estimates.

There is the increase to the car parking congestion levy in the budget. Labor is increasing the rates and expanding the geographic area that will be subject to the levy to include the eastern suburbs, raising an additional \$94 million in tax, an increase of 73 per cent. Motor vehicle taxes and registration fees will also increase under this budget. Car registrations are expected to increase by \$162 million, and the duty the government imposes on these registrations, effectively double taxing Victorians, will increase by \$75 million. The budget papers predict that motor vehicle registration fees will increase by 5.1 per cent a year. So not only are fuel prices going up, but the cost of registering your car under the Labor government is increasing as well.

Labor's fiscal strategy has two points: skyrocketing debt and taxing Victorians more in a cost-of-living crisis. The Victorian Liberals will take a different approach and have already announced cutting five taxes. If elected next year, we will cut the emergency services tax, giving \$3 billion back to Victorians, we will cut the health tax, we will cut the schools tax and we will cut Labor's holiday and tourism tax. That is so important for my electorate in the Yarra Valley. We will cut the stamp duty for first home buyers, for young people aspiring to own their own home. Again, all Labor know is skyrocketing debt and taxing Victorians more, and it is a shame on them in a cost-of-living crisis.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (12:04): I too rise to speak about the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. I will get onto the details of the bill shortly, but I just want to take up a few of the points that have been raised by members of the opposition. The member for Evelyn seems to think that if only we had kept some of our timber industry we would be flush with royalties. Unfortunately, we do not have timber that is 300 million years old, which would form a great swathe – the black coal that Queensland and New South Wales have. In fact since 2010, just to talk about royalties, Western Australia has taken \$101 billion in royalty income from iron ore and petroleum and Queensland and New South Wales have raked in \$74 billion and \$29 billion respectively, mostly on black coal, compared to just \$1 billion in royalties in Victoria. Even our gas resources do not fall within the Victorian purview because they are on the continental shelf and they are outside the state exclusion zone, so they go to the Commonwealth and not to the state. It is very easy for other states' budgets to conveniently avoid looking at the royalties as a revenue in terms of their total taxation, and a royalty is a tax on the industry and the business of that state.

I also want to talk about stamp duty, both what is announced in this bill, which is the extension of the off-the-plan temporary duty concession, and also the changes that have been proposed by the Shadow Treasurer. You would have thought he had just invented sliced bread, such is his passion in terms of identifying this as this great new policy that they have just stumbled across that nobody had ever thought of before. I do want to point out that there is an existing stamp duty concession for first home owners right here in Victoria and if you are buying a new home the concessions are greater still. I do want to make it really clear that the plan that the opposition have announced is not about building any more housing at all, because it can apply across the board, whether it is an existing home or it is a new home.

There is a very instructive example on the State Revenue Office website. It talks about a new home owner who is buying an apartment off the plan for \$950,000, so that is just within the limit of what the Shadow Treasurer has been talking about. Because he is buying that apartment off the plan he can deduct the contract price from the overall cost, and if that is reduced and if that is below \$750,000, which is the threshold, he can receive a concession. In fact if it is below \$600,000, that individual can receive a full reduction in the stamp duty. By having those different measures in place, if you can find a home up to a million dollars and a new home that is up to a million dollars and you are able to afford that, you are likely to already get that stamp duty advantage.



So who is this really going to benefit? It is only going to benefit a small number of people who are actually buying existing homes. If you are buying existing homes, you are not actually making any change to the overall housing supply and the housing stock, which is desperately needed. We know the Shadow Treasurer has a lot of form in this place, because he has been very vocal that he does not want more housing in his area. On one side he is offering this carrot, which is not really a carrot at all, but he is putting it out there as if it is some new invention that only the Liberal Party could have ever thought up. But associated with that, there is not a single policy that addresses the housing supply issue and actually brings more housing into the market and encourages particularly first home owners to get into the housing market and deliver that supply.

I think this ties into the extension of the off-the-plan temporary duty concession that we are proposing in this bill. It has been a really important policy initiative, because we have a lot of development that occurs in Box Hill, as most members would know. That development takes many different forms, so even in a large development you will have quite a number of small apartments which are at the lower end of the price range. Then you will have numerous penthouses and higher order apartments that would be perhaps sort of in the \$3 million, \$4 million range. A lot of the developers say that to get a development off the ground they need to have a certain amount of buyers and a certain amount of off-the-plan buyers to be able to commence construction. Where those buyers come from, they do not really mind, but it is often going to be at the higher end that that investment will occur, and that will trigger and stimulate the development of that property, which will then bring to market all of the other properties and all of the other apartments that are within that development. Particularly in this period of time, where obviously we know it has been a difficult time for the property industry with the rising costs of construction and interest rates, at the lower end there are not as many buyers coming into the market. All of those factors contribute to needing a policy that further incentivises other buyers, including investors, to come into the market at various ends of the spectrum. I think having this extension in the bill is a really good initiative. Obviously we have seen how it has worked for 12 months. I remember when it was introduced and when it was announced back in 2024, the Property Council Australia actually called for it to be extended for a longer period of time, because they said investors and property developers need a bit more certainty. They need to have that extended length of time to be able to make some of those decisions, particularly at the higher end of things. So I am glad to see that that has been included in the bill.

The other matter I wanted to refer to is the changes in the Land Tax Act 2005 in relation to the build-to-rent developments. This bill clarifies that a minimum three-year rental lease must be genuinely offered to a renter in a build-to-rent development in order for the development to receive significant tax benefits. This is a really important issue in my community. We are witnessing quite a number of build-to-rent proposals and quite significant build-to-rent proposals. A couple of months ago I attended the topping-out ceremony of our largest build-to-rent apartment building in Box Hill. I think it has 450 dwellings that will be added to the housing stock. A key reason why it was able to get over the line and be developed was the build-to-rent scenario and operations that we have introduced into this state. It will mean 600 to 800 new people coming into Box Hill and being able to rent in Box Hill in a variety of different apartment sizes. I know it does include some affordable housing as well. So it is an important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (12:14): I rise to make a contribution on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. It is a bill that the opposition are not opposing, but we do have some textual amendments and some things that we would certainly like to see included in this. I cannot help myself but to start – knowing that this is a taxation bill – by looking at comments by our Treasurer, particularly at the Property Council Australia forum the other day. She asked everybody what their favourite tax was and made a bit of a mockery about taxation in Victoria. I found that offensive, and it should be offensive to all Victorians that she was joking when we have become the highest taxing state.

We have a bill before us which makes amendments to quite a number of areas today regarding taxation. It amends the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024, so that is fairly new and

they are already making changes; 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 that is in relation to Trust for Nature, which maybe not so many people in this chamber are familiar with but is something that I have seen used in my area on private property quite a bit. And it is disappointing that some of the land that has been fenced off to help replenish it and rejuvenate it has been left and is blackberry-laden.

However, I am going to first of all begin my comments talking about the changes to regional employees, and I note how important regional Victoria is to the state's economy. Regional Victoria does not receive the funding that I think it should. But this amendment here is around the Payroll Tax Act, and it is about the definition of a regional employee. I figure that means there has been a little bit of grey. I am not quite sure – I was not able to go to the bill briefing – whether there were issues around the interpretation or even legal matters afoot. For about seven or eight years now regional employers have been entitled to reduced payroll tax. This is essentially a stimulus, and it is to support businesses and employment growth in regional areas. Being in regional Victoria, we need that stimulus and regional growth. I think again of comments by the Treasurer, who said:

... unlike WA who can literally dig money out of the ground, in Victoria, we have limited ability to raise revenue.

That is why they certainly look at increased taxing. And I look at some of the bigger projects that do impact on regional Victoria, where there are big employers, and this certainly has been in the gas industry and in the timber industry, which the member for Evelyn canvassed as well. In 2019 there were about 29,000 Victorians employed in the timber industry, and it contributed about \$1.5 billion to the Victorian economy. So on one hand the government is trying to do the right thing by offering payroll incentives and clarifying the definitions here. But at the same time, by closing down the timber industry and really putting the brakes on gas exploration in Victoria, it is working in the opposite direction.

I am going to spend the rest of my contribution talking about the family violence tax relief. These are amendments that are brought forward around land tax duties and the first home owner grant and homebuyer scheme. Now, family violence is something that everybody in this chamber agrees needs to be tackled. And I would just like the government to understand that there is not the headway being made that they continue to claim. If I have a look at the crime statistics in family violence areas only, serious assault in the last 12 months has gone up 15.8 per cent. This is in the family violence context. Common assault is up 8 per cent. Family violence stalking is up 15.74 per cent, nearly 16 per cent. Harassment and private nuisance is up nearly 13 per cent, and threatening behaviour is up 14 per cent. Harassment, if you look at a decade, is up 134 per cent over a decade, and assault over a decade is up 68 per cent. So the government must understand that they are not kicking the goals in this space that they all claim to be kicking. It is really quite distressing. It is more than just a checklist and saying, 'We're doing this and we're doing that.' We have to make a difference. Those statistics must change. And I want to reiterate that those statistics are from the family violence dashboard of the crime statistics. They are not broad; they are within that context.

The Minister for Prevention of Family Violence earlier when she spoke on this bill said:

... if we are not tackling prevention in this space, we are not doing our jobs.

So then, Minister, I ask – through you, Chair: why is it that you have cut primary prevention of family violence in this budget? That is just direct hypocrisy to stand here and to say:

... if we are not tackling prevention in this space, we are not doing our jobs.

But just last week they handed down a budget that is spending a lot less in this space – 24 per cent less than what they spent last year. That is staggering.

I notice that people on the government benches are really trying to ignore what I am saying. That should not be the case. Family violence service delivery is down 3 per cent on what was spent last year, so the minister needs to get a grip on the budget, because I really do not think she understands this portfolio. I know she is new to the ministry, but she has had it previously, so she should know that we need to be doing more in this space.

What this legislation does is provide certainty for those who flee family violence in and around the land tax bill that they may receive if they have a property. This provides some certainty if you have fled family violence and you have no intention of returning. At the minute they cannot access a land tax exemption if they cannot know for sure – they have to get the ex gratia payments, jump through different hoops and things like that. But this provides a six-year window for them to be exempt from land tax. However, that is if they do not receive any money. Say you have a property that you get land tax on, you flee that property and you cannot use that, because if you earn money, you cannot get a land tax exemption, so you cannot rent it out. If you are going to somewhere else, another property, perhaps you will be paying rent there. So you are really hit financially with a bit of a double whammy. You have got a vacant property; if you rent it out, you cannot get the land tax exemption, and you will be paying rent elsewhere.

I would not want to be in a position where I relied on the government to help, because the average waiting time for long-term social housing for clients who have received a priority housing or priority transfer allocation due to family violence is 18 months. Again, the targets are 10 months. Well, they are not even close to their targets. You would not want to be relying on that. On one hand the government are saying, ‘We want to help people, give them a break for six years with land tax,’ but then we will have a vacant property that no-one is using. And we have got a problem with rental properties. It makes much more sense that they can rent that property out so that they have got an income, they are offsetting the rent that they are paying elsewhere and they do not get sluggish with this additional burden. If you have fled family violence, you are in a fairly heightened state. You are stressed. If you have children, they are stressed as well. It is very difficult to re-establish yourself and to recover if you are still worrying about a property that you might have to keep maintained. You have to continue making sure that the gardens are in a condition that is not upsetting the neighbours, that the house is not falling into disrepair. So you are still going to have costs. I do not think the government has really seen this in its entirety.

What this bill also does, though, is allow victim-survivors to access first home buyer benefits if they purchase another home, because they may have been a first home buyer with their former spouse, the person they owned the property with, through the breakdown and the family violence. When they are getting their next property and they are trying to re-establish themselves, they do have a bit of a foot in the door. I would really like to see this extended to victims of natural disasters, particularly floods, because if your house has had havoc wrought on it by floods and the floorboards are all rotting, you have got damp in the wall – we do not have tradies in the country that are just there to jump at things really quickly, and the smell and the works that need to be done there can take two or three years. I would like to see this exemption get extended to include those that have suffered as a result of natural disaster when they cannot live in that property but they are still doing it tough and have been sluggish land tax.

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (12:24): I rise also to speak in support of the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. As members here know, we debated the annual appropriation bills yesterday, but both Labor and Liberal treasurers have for a long time also brought a state taxation amendment bill to the Parliament that deals with more long-term taxation arrangements, and before us is the first such bill brought by our new Treasurer. I do just want to begin by acknowledging our new Treasurer’s great work on this bill in what continues of course to be a challenging environment.

Budget paper 2 sets out some of the challenges that we face and notes that while the COVID-19 pandemic is now five years behind us, we do still see the economic aftershocks of that event. Most notably, the inflation that peaked in 2022 has really only just subsided, and we see the cash rate changes

continue to follow that. Of course, as the Treasurer said in her budget speech, we have a five-part fiscal strategy in place for that post-COVID era, and this budget makes strong progress on the third step and brings the fourth and fifth into the forwards as our capital expenditure moderates back to those pre-COVID levels. I just want to note that this bill comes before us in the context of the Treasurer's good work on that budget and note of course that there are no new taxes in here, as the Treasurer made clear.

Nonetheless this bill is an important part of our total budget package, and I do have to turn to the opposition's position on this bill, as set out by the members for Eildon and Evelyn. I was slightly surprised that the member for Brighton, when he stood up, did not take the opportunity to move amendments to stamp duties or other things that he spoke about very passionately yesterday. Instead he has circulated some different amendments that we have in front of us that essentially pick up on two topics. The first one is the matter relating to natural disasters, which the member for Eildon was just speaking about. As the member for Eildon probably knows, there are some longstanding arrangements whereby those things are dealt with with ex gratia payments, as has actually been the case, as the Minister for Women alluded to, with respect to family violence situations. We are making an important change to bring in some of those family violence arrangements to give them legislative certainty in the bill before us.

I understand that the member for Brighton was suggesting the same thing for natural disasters. We have only seen that at 11:30 this morning. I think that, unusually, the member for Brighton said that the opposition will not even be voting in favour of those amendments; they are just going to wait for them to go to the upper house. So that is what they will do.

**Cindy McLeish** interjected.

**Nathan LAMBERT:** It is, as the member for Eildon points out, the procedure of the house, as I understand it. But the more substantial amendment that the opposition have brought forward relates to omitting clause 29. I do think, Acting Speaker, in a different role you as the member for Frankston have already spoken eloquently to this unusual argument made by the member for Brighton. He tried to claim that this change in clause 29 was a new tax, which, as we know, it is not, as you pointed out in your contribution. Unfortunately there are a small number of people in this state who try very, very hard to avoid tax, and the poor State Revenue Office spends a lot of time dealing with these people. One thing they often do, because they know they get in a lot of trouble for fraudulently trying to avoid tax, is they try and make it look like they accidentally forgot to pay their tax.

There have been penalties in place for that for a long time now. There is a 25 per cent penalty if it looks like you did genuinely accidentally do it and then a 75 per cent one if it looks like you actually did it deliberately. All that the bill in front of us does is introduce a tier in between – a 50 per cent threshold – that allows the SRO to punish people for what is reckless behaviour. I put it to the member for Brighton that for some people that will probably be used in place of the 75 per cent penalty – it may actually be a slight reduction in the penalties they face. But your point, Acting Speaker, when you were making your contribution, was the most important: those kinds of things have never been treated as new taxes and in fact are not treated as taxes in our constitution.

The more substantial point that the member for Brighton made in his contribution yesterday, repeated by members of the opposition today of course, relates to their proposed big budget changes, where they claim that they are going to abolish five taxes and return billions of dollars to Victorians. There is a lot to unpack in that proposal from the opposition, but I suppose the centrepiece of it was the changes to concession arrangements for stamp duty for first home buyers. I think the member for Box Hill, who spoke on behalf of the government earlier, addressed those really well, pointing out that the most important fact, which we must point out again, is that is existing Labor government policy. There are already concessions – full concessions, up to \$600,000 – from stamp duty for first home buyers. It is existing policy for a good reason. We understand that home ownership rates have been falling, and the Premier acknowledged that in her contributions yesterday. In fact the Premier also spoke to the very good work that we are doing on the supply front, which is very important to that question of home

ownership, and in fact in the bill in front of us we have some important amendments relating to the off-the-plan concession. We know that that off-the-plan concession helps people who are building new housing and helps the finances stack up when they are doing those projects. I see some nods from the member for Morwell – he knows that and supports it.

Similarly, we have some further extensions to our build-to-rent arrangements, and they also very importantly recognise that someone who is constructing new dwellings to rent out is doing something very different from someone who is just buying an existing dwelling to rent out. The people constructing new ones are adding to our supply, and the bill before us allows us to continue providing them with a concession to support the construction of new housing and to make it easier for everyone in Victoria to purchase a new house, including first home buyers.

I do want to touch on a very central part of the member for Brighton's case yesterday, which was this allegation that 43 per cent of the cost of a new home in Victoria is taxes and charges. I see you smiling, Acting Speaker Edbrooke, only because I know like most of us you heard that and thought, 'That is ridiculous.' That is the claim that if you are purchasing a new home in Reservoir for a million dollars you pay \$430,000 in tax. So I went and looked it up just out of curiosity, and I can let you know that, as you perhaps might have expected, it is a fabrication; it is an exaggeration upon an exaggeration. The first important point is that the work that was done there by the Housing Industry Association only refers to new houses. Secondly, it does not just count the direct taxes that you may have thought of – GST and stamp duty and so forth; it counts every possible tax you can imagine. So for a carpenter working on that site who had paid income tax as part of their work – as we all pay income tax – those income taxes are counted. As far as I can tell, if the carpenter went for lunch and paid GST on their hamburger, that was also counted. But then that of course does not get you anywhere near 43 per cent, and so what they had to introduce was this notion of regulatory costs.

Essentially, looking at it – Acting Speaker, you will enjoy this – they said that a block of land in Melbourne should cost \$30,000. I know there are some members here that know – and the Minister for Agriculture at the table probably knows – that even out, say, Beveridge way I do not think you can buy a block of land for that; I imagine you would be looking more north of \$200,000 to buy a block. Why does it cost more than \$30,000? Well, it costs that because of course there are infrastructure costs and there is also extra demand. I imagine in some parts of the Mallee, where I originally grew up, you could find a house block for \$30,000, but naturally a house block right next to Melbourne costs more for both the demand and infrastructure reasons, which I presumably do not have to set out to the house.

So that was the way in which they managed to get to this 43 per cent number, by introducing this magical regulatory costs category. To be honest, I feel a little sorry for the poor economist in that consultancy who spent many years getting their PhD. I know they did this bit of work, and people would have come to them and said, 'We want a really big number,' and they would have said, 'The tax contribution – we can get that to 10 per cent,' and they would have been saying, 'No, we need a really big number,' and I can only credit their creativity in managing to get to that very big number.

But the real question, I think, is – and I may draw my remarks to a conclusion around this, and the Minister for Finance made this most important point yesterday: when the opposition walk into this place and say that they are going to cut billions of dollars worth of taxes, it is a little difficult for me to work out exactly how much they are planning to cut. They flagged the \$3 billion figure across the forward years, which relates to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, but I am not clear what the remainder of their proposed cuts add up to – let us just say billions. The fundamental point – you will appreciate this, Acting Speaker – is that that would place the budget into deficit, and the Minister for Finance quite rightly asked: how are you going to get the budget out of deficit and balance your books if you are making billions of dollars worth of tax cuts? Today, here we are now at 12:30 the day after the budget reply, and we have still had, as I understand it, no answer to that question. Are they going to cut health? Are they going to cut education? Are they going to reverse the free travel for under-18s that the government just announced, to some popular acclaim, I might add? Maybe they are reversing that. It is incumbent upon the opposition, if they are going to walk into this place – we have

a taxation bill in front of us – and say that they are going to reduce tax by billions of dollars, to explain how they are doing so.

I leave that key question still unanswered, but I just want to note that the rest of the more technical matters of this bill are of course very commendable. I want to thank our new Treasurer, who I said has done a great job, and Chris Barrett at the Department of Treasury and Finance and all the team there. I commend this bill to the house as an important part of an important 2025–26 budget for the people of Victoria.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (12:34): I rise to talk on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. As previous speakers have also gone through, this bill amends various taxation-related acts, including 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. This bill comes in to clean up and make better our tax amendments that come through. I am sure that most Victorians at the moment can feel and see that we have a lot of tax that we have to pay to the government.

One of the amendments coming through is the amendment to the land tax. There have been a few people that have touched on how it makes a change for people that have to pay land tax that are involved with domestic and family violence. It is a good thing that if people going through family violence need to sell the family home, there is an avenue for them so that when the assets are divided up they do not have to pay a proportion of land tax on the property. Domestic violence is a scourge on every person in Victoria that suffers from it, from the person that is experiencing it right through to the children.

I note that down in the Latrobe Valley family violence skyrocketed 18.3 per cent last year, a figure that is heartbreaking for most people in the Latrobe Valley. A lot of it goes unspoken and unheard, but we do need to speak about these skyrocketing figures. The rate of family violence incidents in the region last year was 3891 per 100,000 population, and I am very, very sad to say that the Latrobe Valley had the second-highest rate in the state. But further to that, unfortunately, the next one in line is East Gippsland. It encompasses the Gippsland region, and domestic and family violence is at the forefront of what is happening in the Latrobe Valley at the moment. It is terrible that it is happening, and we need to put things in place to make sure that we get on top of it. Most concerning is that 36 per cent of all the family violence incidents in Latrobe last year involved children. We need to make sure that we try hard to provide outlets and avenues to people that are experiencing domestic violence. We need to make sure that there is a pathway for them and that we can help them to get out. The land tax exemption is going to play a big part in that.

As a former business owner running a plumbing business in the Latrobe Valley, I have had to pay my fair share of tax over the journey, as have many. As you said in your speech, Acting Speaker Edbrooke, we know that we have to pay tax and we know that we have an obligation. I am sure every single person that has to pay tax looks at every single way they can pay the least amount of tax that they can. As I said, as a small business owner there were times when the tax bill would come in and I would look at it and think, ‘How am I going to pay this?’ We had to ring up and ask for extensions on deadlines and we had to go on payments, but we always met that final bill that we had to pay.

When we talk to people in small business in the valley, those lines that I experienced years ago are still there. We are paying over 60 new taxes since the government came in. An emergency services and volunteers tax was introduced, and we have seen the issues on the front steps and around the state, because it is one thing to have a new tax and have to pay it, but it is another thing to have the money and the capital to be able to pay it. I am a regional MP, and we talk to our farmers, landowners and the people that are providing our food and fibre for the state. They say to me, ‘How are we going to actually be able to pay for these taxes that are coming in?’ So any tax breaks – and concerns – we can

do here in the chamber are welcome. I do note that last week it was mentioned that the coalition, if we do form government, will scrap that tax, and that has been widely well received.

On the government's new volunteer emergency services tax, we have got the Hazelwood North CFA, which is looking for new sheds and new equipment. This particular CFA shed is going to be 100 years old in a couple of years – that is as long as they have been around protecting the community. One of their major roles is to look after mine fires, as you are well and truly aware, Acting Speaker, and once again we did not get funding in the budget for that. We would think that the new emergency services tax would possibly go towards funding new, fit-for-purpose facilities. It is an old shed with one toilet, so as we move through these days of having both male and female CFA members we need to make sure that, if we are collecting this tax, it does go through to our CFA community, providing them with well and truly justified, fit-for-purpose facilities and also new trucks and new equipment, which we can do.

I want to change a little bit to talk about the impending shutdown of the Yallourn coal-fired power station, followed by Loy Yang – Yallourn in a couple of years time and Loy Yang in 10 years time. What we find there is that the people that work in the industry at the moment are on a very, very good wage. They probably get paid between \$200,000 to \$300,000 working in the mine. They pay their taxes, then they move into the community and spend their money in the community. So one of my biggest concerns at the moment is trying to work out where the new industries are that are going to keep these people that are in this \$200,000 to \$300,000 wage bracket. How do we entice them to stay in the vicinity of the Latrobe Valley? We do not want them moving on.

That is where we need the government to come forward and tell us what manufacturing boom in the renewables sector is going to keep these people in the valley, to make sure that our schools stay open and that they are providing support to all our community groups with the money that they do make, and on the flip side ensuring that they continue to pay their fair share of tax to the state government so we – especially Labor, which is in government at the moment – can make sure that they can balance the books. So one of the questions is: what is around the corner? I would love the minister to come out and say we have these 200, 300, 400 or 500 jobs so people are going to be able to stay in jobs earning that \$200,000 to \$300,000 a year. That is about all from me.

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (12:44): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

## **Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024**

### *Council's amendments*

#### **Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 6, page 6, after line 25 insert –  

“**certificate of insurance**, in relation to a retirement village, means a certificate issued by an insurer who has insured property in the village against damage which sets out the terms of the insurance policy given and the start and end date of the policy;”.
2. Clause 6, page 9, after line 21 insert –  

“**pet** means any animal other than an assistance dog within the meaning of the **Equal Opportunity Act 2010**;”.

3. Clause 7, page 25, line 2, after this line insert –  
    **“3EA Interpretation of vacant possession and permanently vacating**
  - (1) In this Act, in relation to a premises occupied by a resident in a retirement village, a reference to giving up or delivering vacant possession of the premises, however expressed, is a reference to the point in time when all the following have occurred –
    - (a) the resident has ceased to occupy the premises;
    - (b) all personal property of the resident has been removed from the premises;
    - (c) any keys to the premises have been returned to the operator or proprietor of the village;
    - (d) if the resident occupies the premises under a retirement village contract that requires notice to be given before the resident delivers up vacant possession of the premises, the notice has been given and the notice period has elapsed.
  - (2) Subsection (1) is not intended to limit the common law meaning of delivering up or giving vacant possession of a premises.
  - (3) In this Act, in relation to a premises occupied by a resident in a retirement village, a reference to permanently vacating the premises, however expressed, is a reference to the point in time at which the resident delivers up vacant possession of the premises.”
4. Clause 19, page 49, after line 7 insert –  
    “(fa) the prescribed information about or relating to all insurance arrangements that are in place in relation to the retirement village (other than policies of insurance held by residents of the village) including –
  - (i) details of any insurance policies in force over all or part of the village and copies of any relevant certificates of insurance; and
  - (ii) details of any funds set aside by the operator or proprietor to insure against any potential damage to the village by whatever means;”
5. Clause 19, page 63, lines 6 to 12, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –  
    “expiration of the period during which the contract can be rescinded under section 26X.”
6. Clause 19, page 67, after line 3 insert –  
    “(ea) the prescribed information about or relating to all insurance arrangements that are in place in relation to the retirement village (other than policies of insurance held by residents of the village) including –
  - (i) details of any insurance policies in force over all or part of the village and copies of any relevant certificates of insurance; and
  - (ii) details of any funds set aside by the operator or proprietor to insure against any potential damage to the village by whatever means;”
7. Clause 19, page 68, after line 3 insert –  
    “(ba) the prescribed information about or relating to all insurance arrangements that are in place in relation to the retirement village (other than policies of insurance held by residents of the village) including –
  - (i) details of any insurance policies in force over all or part of the village and copies of any relevant certificates of insurance; and
  - (ii) details of any funds set aside by the operator or proprietor to insure against any potential damage to the village by whatever means;”
8. Clause 19, page 78, lines 16 to 28, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
  - “(1) Despite anything to the contrary in the **Sale of Land Act 1962**, a person who signs a residence contract to become a resident in a retirement village may, at any time before the end of the period of 7 business days after signing the contract, rescind the contract in accordance with this Act.
  - (2) If a person rescinds a contract under subsection (1), the person is entitled to the return of all money paid under the contract by the person, except for the prescribed administration fee, if any, which may be retained –
    - (a) if a contracting party has entered into the contract, by the contracting party; or



- (b) if an owner resident has entered into the contract, by the owner resident.”.
9. Clause 19, page 78, line 31, omit “resident that the resident may” and insert “person who signs the contract that the person may”.
  10. Clause 19, page 78, line 32, omit “3 clear business days after the resident” and insert “7 business days after the person”.
  11. Clause 19, page 78, line 34, omit “resident” and insert “person”.
  12. Clause 19, page 79, lines 3 and 4, omit “a resident who is a party to the contract” and insert “the person who has signed the contract to become a resident”.
  13. Clause 36, page 113, lines 28 to 31, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
    - “(2) The quorum for a meeting of residents is –
      - (a) for a retirement village with 40 or more residents who are entitled to vote in the meeting, 25% of those residents; or
      - (b) for a retirement village with 20 or more residents but fewer than 40 residents who are entitled to vote in the meeting, 10 of those residents; or
      - (c) for a retirement village with fewer than 20 residents who are entitled to vote in the meeting, 50% of those residents.”.
  14. Clause 43, line 32, omit “2010.” and insert “2010; or”.
  15. Clause 43, after line 32 insert –
    - “(e) unreasonably limit the keeping of a pet on a resident’s premises.”.
  16. Clause 46, line 8, omit “Former” and insert “Certain”.
  17. Clause 46, after line 14 insert –
    - “(2) If a resident of a retirement village dies before delivering up vacant possession of the resident’s premises in the village, the resident is not liable for a maintenance charge that arises on or after the time of death of the resident.”.
  18. Clause 46, line 15, omit “(2)” and insert “(3)”.
  19. Clause 46, line 16, after “village” insert “(as the case requires)”.
  20. Clause 46, after line 24 insert –
    - “(4) If a resident of a retirement village dies before delivering up vacant possession of the resident’s premises in the village, the proprietor or operator of the retirement village (as the case requires) must not purport to charge a maintenance charge that arises on or after the time of death of the resident.
    - Penalty: 60 penalty units for a natural person;  
120 penalty units for a body corporate.”.
  21. Clause 46, line 25, omit “(3)” and insert “(5)”.
  22. Clause 48, page 142, line 3, after “village” insert “(as the case requires)”.
  23. Clause 48, page 142, after line 12 insert –
    - “(2) If a resident of a retirement village dies before delivering up vacant possession of the resident’s premises in the village, the proprietor or operator of the village (as the case requires) must not levy a charge for optional services against the resident for any period on or after the time of death of the resident.
    - Penalty: 60 penalty units for a natural person;  
120 penalty units for a body corporate.”.
  24. Clause 48, page 142, line 13, omit “(2)” and insert “(3)”.
  25. Clause 48, page 142, line 15, after “(1)” insert “or (2)”.
  26. Clause 61, line 14, omit “3 business days” and insert “7 business days”.
  27. Clause 66, page 208, after line 15 insert –
    - “(3) On and from the commencement of section 6 of the **Retirement Villages Amendment Act 2024**, any reference in another Act or in regulations made under another Act to a *residence right*, within the meaning of this Act as in force before that commencement, being

a reference in the other Act or regulations that was in force immediately before that commencement, includes a reference to a *right to occupy premises*, within the meaning of this Act as in force on and from that commencement.”.

28. Clause 66, page 211, lines 3 to 30, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

“Despite the commencement of section 19 of the **Retirement Villages Amendment Act 2024** –

(a) Divisions 2, 3, 5 and 6 of new Part 4 do not apply –

- (i) to any resident of a retirement village who occupies the village under an applicable resident right; and
- (ii) in respect of any applicable residence contract; and

(b) sections 18, 18A, 18B and 20 to 26 of the old Act continue to apply to any such resident and to any such contract as if, in relation to the resident and contract, any reference (however expressed) to –

- (i) an owner of a retirement village within the meaning of section 3 of the old Act were a reference to the proprietor of the retirement village occupied by the resident, and a reference to that owner’s agent were a reference to that proprietor’s agent; and
- (ii) a manager of a retirement village within the meaning of section 3 of the old Act were a reference to the operator of the retirement village occupied by the resident, and a reference to that manager’s agent were a reference to that operator’s agent.”.

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (12:45): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

It is a real pleasure to be able to speak to these amendments and to speak to this bill, because I did not have the opportunity to do so when it was introduced. It was introduced by the member for Dandenong, my predecessor in the consumer affairs portfolio, and I thank her for the power of work that she did to get it to this point.

I will just briefly go through the amendments. Firstly, disclosure of insurance information: a key focus of these reforms is to support residents to make informed decisions about entering and living in a retirement village by making important information easier to access and to understand. This amendment will go further by requiring retirement village operators to disclose information about insurance arrangements protecting the retirement village. Operators will be required to disclose insurance information to prospective residents in the information statement and to all residents as part of their annual contract check.

Secondly, vacant possession: the Victorian government has listened to stakeholders’ concerns and is providing greater clarity about when a resident leaves a retirement village. This amendment will clarify that a resident or their estate delivers vacant possession when they have given notice, they no longer occupy the unit, they remove all personal property and they return the keys to the unit. This will ensure both residents and operators understand when the exit entitlement repayment period begins and certain fees can no longer be charged to the resident.

Thirdly, the cooling-off period: entering into a retirement village is a significant life decision carrying substantial financial implications. Residents should be able to take time to decide whether retirement village living is right for them. This amendment will provide non-owner residents with more time to make those important decisions by extending the cooling-off period from three to seven business days. If residents change their mind about entering a village during the cooling-off period, they can cancel their contract and get their money back.

Number four, quorum for residents meetings: it is important that residents can have a say in the decisions that affect them. The bill introduces a quorum requirement to ensure that important decisions cannot be made without resident participation, such as increasing maintenance charges, paying a special levy and varying services provided in the village. This amendment will strike the balance

between supporting residents' participation and ensuring that quorums for residents meetings are workable.

Number five, prohibition on maintenance charges and optional service charges after a resident has died: this bill will introduce a definition of 'vacant possession' to clarify when maintenance and personal service charges must no longer be charged to a resident. In some cases a resident may die while in occupation in the retirement village, and it becomes their estate's responsibility to deliver vacant possession of the retirement village unit. Commonly the granting of probate or administration can take several weeks to finalise. It is not fair that fees and charges continue to accrue during this time. This amendment will clarify that operators cannot continue to levy maintenance charges against the resident's estate for any period after they have died.

Finally, retirement village residents with pets: Ms Purcell in the other place moved an amendment that seeks to ensure that retirement villages cannot unreasonably limit the keeping of a pet on a resident's premises. The government supported this amendment. This builds upon the government's reform of allowing pets in private rentals, ensuring that a house can be a home.

In my 11 years as a parliamentarian I have met with a lot of retirement village residents, because we do have a lot of retirement villages in the Bentleigh electorate. I have met people who absolutely love living in their village; they love the lifestyle it gives them. But to be brutally honest, I have also had older ladies in my electorate office in tears because they did not know what they had got themselves into. I acknowledge that for a lot of people retirement living is the way to go, but people need to make that substantial life decision having had all of the facts explained to them – armed with all the facts, armed with all the knowledge – but also having sufficient protections in place, and this bill is a substantial step forward. But the work does not stop there. I will be establishing a mandatory code of practice that I expect all retirement village operators to comply with.

We will also be establishing a conciliation scheme to ensure that disputes between retirement village operators and residents can be resolved, and that dispute resolution service will be linked to the regulator. That is the key – it will be linked to the regulator. In so doing, I say as Minister for Consumer Affairs that I will take a zero-tolerance approach to any retirement village operators who are not complying with the mandatory code of practice. I have also asked the commissioner for residential tenancies and retirement villages to establish a lived-experience forum of retirement village residents so that retirement village residents can have an official channel into government advising on the implementation of these reforms and any further reforms. With those few words, I commend the amendments to the house.

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (12:51): I am delighted to make a few comments on the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024 as well, as the minister has just noted. Certainly I want to begin by thanking and congratulating the retirement living council president Lawrie Robertson, who we have worked tirelessly with. He has worked with us and with the government and has had a good hearing on both sides. I think Lawrie is an outstanding representative of the people who are living in retirement villages. Congratulations to Lawrie for the work that he has done, and also to Les Scobie. He actually lives in Wangaratta and has been a tireless worker for retirement villages, and he has had a lot of input, as have the many other residents and operators who have contributed. I think operators also need to be considered in this whole process, because it takes two sides to get something together. You have got to have residents and you have got to have operators, and you have got to have them working together. It is not about a top-down approach, it is about making sure that they both have a fair say in these procedures.

The contributions over the journey – we have been working together for what seems like a decade, but I think it has only been three or four years since the first draft was put out. But I am pleased that we have made it through this far. There still are a few flaws and we do have a few concerns from residents, but we all know we cannot please everybody; it is about trying to strike that balance. There are still a

few issues that are unaddressed, and hopefully they will still get addressed through the regulation as we move forward.

Can I say that of the government amendments I think five out of the six of their amendments have been driven through the discussions that we have had in the lower house and between houses, and I am pleased to see some of those amendments get up. I would say that we can show that sometimes by working together we can get a better outcome.

I do want to thank the minister and his staff for the engagement and the feedback and the explanations. I know you are the minister at the end of a long line of ministers for consumer affairs – I think five in five years is the count I am up to, since that exposure draft was put in. As I said, I congratulate the minister on getting us to this point where we do have agreement between residents and operators. But, without pumping up the minister's tyres too much, I think there is still some work to do in Consumer Affairs Victoria, and I certainly hope that he takes that on board, because as the shadow minister we see so many different issues come through our office not being addressed by Consumer Affairs Victoria. So we have all got work to do.

I also want to point out the Greens. Where are they? They are not here today again. Is it Friday or is it Thursday? I am not sure. But anyway, the Greens, who always want to be seen to be standing up for residents and standing up for renters, voted against every resident-led amendment that we put forward, so that tells you where the Greens stand on this issue. It really is abysmal. But anyway, they will still go out with their narrative that they are looking after residents and retirement village people, but at the end of the day they voted against the amendments that we put up.

As I say, the devil is in the detail, and as the minister has said, we will see that code of conduct put in place, and again, we respect that. I look forward to that and certainly hope that the residents and the operators have a say as that code of conduct is developed. It has been a long run-up – three or four years – and I certainly want to reiterate that we are not opposing this bill. It has been a long time coming, but we are very pleased to have got to where we have by working with both sides. We know certainly on this side – in fact both sides of this chamber know – that for people who are 50 and 60 and beyond and those looking into retirement villages, although they might still be in the prime of their lives, it is an important time for their age group. They certainly want to be enjoying that time, and they should be protected all the way through. I think it is important that this legislation will give more protections to those moving into the retirement sector, whether they are in a retirement village or not. I do commend the minister and the changes that have been made, and I commend the house amendments to this place.

**Motion agreed to.**

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

**State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (12:56):** In the few minutes that I probably have left until lunchtime, I stand here today to strongly support the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025, legislation that places a crucial emphasis on the safety and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable in our community. While this bill includes important tax measures, I want to focus primarily on its significant strides in supporting victim-survivors of family violence. This reflects a core priority of our government. It is no coincidence that the first Victorian budget handed down by a woman has a real and material focus on the wellbeing of women – something all too absent from the priorities of the coalition and their platform.

We recognise that victim-survivors of family violence face immense challenges. Research and tireless community advocacy highlight that they are often socially isolated and financially dependent, trapped by the deliberate actions of their abusers. Frequently current or former partners wield extraordinary control, limiting their victim's movement, communication and access to help. This creates a devastating cycle of isolation, making escape incredibly difficult. Too many Victorians desperately want to leave unsafe situations but lack the financial means to start over, compounded by legitimate safety concerns. This is where proactive government intervention is essential. The provisions within this bill directly address these barriers, seeking to make starting over safer and more attainable for victim-survivors. I believe we all agree that the government has a moral obligation to make recovery and restitution as easy as possible for these individuals. I have seen in my own work the impact that family violence has on young children as well, and it is our obligation to protect those children.

Our commitment to this cause is not new. Since 2014 we have worked diligently, guided by the Royal Commission into Family Violence, to implement extensive systemic changes, making Victoria a leader in this area. Initiatives like the appointment of a Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change demonstrate our ongoing investment in both preventing domestic violence and supporting victim-survivors. Today's reforms represent the next step in this crucial work. Specifically this bill will exempt victim-survivors of family violence from land tax on land they receive no income from and enable them to requalify for first home buyer benefits if they meet the criteria. These are tangible changes that will make a real difference in the lives of victim-survivors, providing them with greater financial stability and the opportunity to rebuild their lives. What more can we do? This is important, and this is life-changing for women, for victims of family violence and for their children. This is important and this is key. This government is doing great things. I commend the bill to the house.

**Sitting suspended 12:59 pm until 2:02 pm.**

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Bail laws**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday two offenders involved in the Northland machete rampage were given bail despite already being on bail at the time of the attacks. Why are dangerous offenders repeatedly bailed under this government's weak bail laws?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): The only thing that is weak in this place is the Leader of the Opposition and his complete failure –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, this is a very serious matter and people are at serious risk. I would ask you to ask the Premier, on relevance, to come back to answering the question.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Speaker, the Premier has been on her feet for 10 seconds, and I would ask that you counsel the Manager of Opposition Business against wasting our time with pointless points of order.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I was reminding the house of how weak the Leader of the Opposition is, because he opposed the tough new bail laws that are now in place today – these tough new bail laws that have put community safety first. The government and the Parliament have made it absolutely clear to the justice system that community safety does come first and is expected to come first in all bail-making decisions. That has been absolutely something that has been communicated by the Attorney-General and made very clear by the government. I am not going to follow the Leader of the Opposition, as he has already this week criticised the actions of Victoria Police, compromising their safety when it comes to the rollout of Australia's first machete ban. I will not follow the Leader of the Opposition into

criticising individual decisions other than to repeat that it is very clear to the government and the Parliament, notwithstanding the opposition from the Leader of the Opposition to these tough new bail laws, that community safety must come first. We will continue to give Victoria Police the tools and the powers and the resources that they need to keep our community safe, and I note we are now 2 hours and 5 minutes into the first ban in the nation on the sale of machetes – the only state in the nation to do so, demonstrating our commitment to community safety.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the Leader of the Nationals, the member for Nepean and the Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting across the table.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It is a very narrow question about offenders being bailed. Could you ask the Premier to come back to that question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): With four Northland offenders out on bail, families, retail workers and security do not feel safe. When will the government finally protect the Victorian community and reverse its weak bail laws?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): In referring to the Leader of the Opposition's question, I would suggest he goes and checks the statements that have been made by Victoria Police. What I will say very clearly is that the experience at Northland shopping centre on Sunday would have been incredibly difficult and traumatic for the retail workers, which is why we are working on legislation right now to increase penalties for people who threaten the safety of retail workers in this state. It also would have been incredibly distressing for the families and the shoppers in that shopping centre to witness this attack, which is why we are so grateful for the swift response from Victoria Police. I will not criticise Victoria Police, like those opposite have done this week. I will not compromise the safety of Victoria Police.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it is a very narrow question about when the government will reverse its weak bail laws. I ask you to ask the Premier to come back that.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** We will continue to build on our tough new bail laws with a second tranche, as we have committed to, to make the bail laws in this state the toughest in the nation.

### Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:08): This morning the Premier and I were delighted to announce yet another way the SEC is helping Victorians slash their energy bills. On top of yesterday's announcement that the SEC is accelerating the build of more renewables, powering government buildings, schools, hospitals, public transport et cetera with 100 per cent renewables, putting downward pressure on prices for everybody, we are now launching the SEC one-stop shop to help Victorian families make electric upgrades to their homes and slash their energy bills. We know that making electric upgrades can be complicated and it is hard to know who to trust. Now Victorians will have the SEC one-stop shop to get free and trusted advice. That is because the SEC is on the side of Victorians.

From February next year the one-stop shop will be available to all of metropolitan Melbourne and regional town centres across the state. Victorians will be able to go online or pick up the phone to the SEC and get connected with a better, trusted installer who can visit their house for a free quote, no strings attached. All products will be vetted. Victorians will also be able to get access to low-interest financing if that is what they want and information about government rebates and discounts all in the

one place. It does not have to cost Victorians more to make the switch, but they will start saving on their energy bills from day one – immediate cost-of-living relief.

We are absolutely helping Victorians with real cost-of-living support. Some could go for Groth or go for Battin; we are going for Victorians with the SEC. We are on the side of Victorians. We know that under Battin's Liberals, who are not on your side, you are on your own. Just ask the member for Hawthorn.

### Community safety

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): My question is to the Premier. Retailers have reported an overnight spike in machete sales. How is the community safer, given that under Labor government policy and failing to implement the ban earlier they are not being banned until September?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): As the member for Hawthorn knows, you cannot trust a word that the Leader of the Opposition says, so we will not take at face value the statement just made by the Leader of the Opposition, because I know from the work that the Minister for Consumer Affairs and the Minister for Police have been doing that they have been working with those retailers. Indeed we have been working with retailers since March. We have been working with them on not putting in orders for the stock and working towards the introduction of Australia's first machete ban, starting with the amnesty in September of this year. In case the Leader of the Opposition missed the memo – missed it because his phone was turned off instead of being turned on to what was going on here in the house – as I have said repeatedly –

**Bridget Vallance**: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

**Mary-Anne Thomas**: Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being entirely relevant in answering the question and being direct and factual.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN**: I did say this in the house yesterday, and I have said this on a number of occasions, but for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition I will say it again. The rollout of Australia's first machete ban is being done as quickly and as safely as possible. That timing and rollout are based on the advice of experts and Victoria Police, not the Leader of the Opposition, who would compromise the safety of Victoria Police and who would be happy to see that safety compromised. I will not stand for that. I will support the work of Victoria Police. We know the Leader of the Opposition and those opposite are all about the politics on this issue; we are all about community safety.

**Bridget Vallance**: On a point of order, Speaker, the reality is there are more machetes on the street. I would ask, on relevance, for the Premier to come back to this very narrow question.

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

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): Premier, isn't it a fact that if the Premier had made machetes a prohibited weapon in 2023 the Northland offenders would face two years in prison?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): Again this question from the Leader of the Opposition demonstrates he is all about the politics and not about the facts and not about community safety. The behaviour at Northland shopping centre on Sunday was illegal behaviour. It was already illegal behaviour, and the Leader of the Opposition –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: Order! Member for Nepean, I have warned you repeatedly today to cease interjecting across the table. This is your last warning.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will repeat again for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, lest he wants to make some mischief and politics with this issue, that the behaviour on the weekend at the Northland shopping centre was illegal behaviour, which is why Victoria Police have moved quickly and which is why people have been arrested. To say anything other than that –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very narrow, about having prohibited machetes back in 2023. I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that very narrow question.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** To infer otherwise just demonstrates that the Leader of the Opposition is playing politics or out of his depth and not across the facts.

### Ministers statements: health system

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:15): Unlike those opposite, the Allan Labor government is focused on what matters most to the people of Victoria, and that means investing in our world-class health system so that Victorians can get the care that they need where and when they need it. This year alone we are investing over \$31 billion into our health system, and this year's budget delivers \$11.1 billion in additional funding, of which \$9.5 billion will be invested in our hospitals. This is the biggest investment ever in the delivery of frontline care here in Victoria. This includes \$634 million to open nine new or expanded hospitals in Frankston, in Footscray, in Maryborough, in Cranbourne, in Phillip Island, in Craigieburn, in Swan Hill, in Albury–Wodonga and of course in Geelong.

This budget is also about reducing the cost-of-living pressure on Victorians and ensuring that our communities are keeping healthy with services that are fast, free and accessible. This includes more emergency care through the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department. It includes more accessible care through our expanded pharmacy program and ongoing access to free urgent care through our network of urgent care clinics.

Those on the other side would just take \$4.6 billion out of the budget, as outlined by the member for Brighton last year, and Victorians need to be asking themselves: where will these cuts come from? I can tell you where they will come from: from cutting, closing and privatising health, because that is what Liberals do. They have done it before, and they will do it again. They have gone to war with our nurses. They went to war with our ambos. They disrespect our healthcare workers.

### Road maintenance

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Why is the government reducing the area of road-patching works next year by 93 per cent?

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:17): I thank the Leader of the National Party for his question. There are a few things in life that you can actually be certain of: night follows day, Peter Hunt writes an inaccurate article and the Leader of the National Party asks a question on the back of it. But that to one side, what I can say is that just two weeks ago the Premier, the Leader of the House and I were out there announcing what this year's roadside blitz will look like, and it is \$976 million. What we will do is spend nearly \$2 billion; we spent \$1 billion this year, and we are about to spend almost \$1 billion next year. What our engineers do is they –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, the question was not about the money, it was about the works actually being done – a 93 per cent reduction.

**Ben Carroll:** On the point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Nationals went to patching – not patching gaps over there but patching the road surfaces – and the minister just went to \$2.5 billion invested in roads. I urge you to let the minister finish her answer.



**The SPEAKER:** The minister to come back to the question.

**Melissa HORNE:** In relation to patching, this was a new budget measure that we introduced two years ago because following the flooding works that we did –

*Members interjecting.*

**Melissa HORNE:** Without assistance, thank you. We introduced this new measure because we have got our engineers out there doing the work that is required on our roads that is right for the circumstance. When it was flooding, we were out there doing the potholes. Then we needed to do the patching work, and now we are out there doing significant rehab works across our network. That is what we are focusing on to be able to invest in our roads with a record investment.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:20): The minister just said we are now moving on to rehabilitation. The government failed to meet its target for road rehabilitation or resurfacing last year, and next year it is reducing the target again. How can the government claim to be spending more money yet delivering less road maintenance?

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:21): The member for Gippsland South fails to understand that we are investing a record amount in our road network. We are on track at the moment to deliver 4.7 million square metres, or approximately 500 kilometres, of major road repairs right across the state. That has far exceeded the combined target of 4.2 million square metres. I appreciate that the member for Gippsland South possibly has a little FOMO not being in PAEC anymore. I appreciate the questions, but we are delivering more work than ever before.

#### **Ministers statements: treaty**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:22): I rise during reconciliation week to update the house on how the Victorian government is turning this year's theme, 'Bridging now to next', into action through treaty. Treaty is our opportunity to reset the relationship between the state and our First Peoples, building a fairer Victoria together. It is about more than words, it is about action. It is about making sure that Aboriginal people have a say on the policies and programs that affect their lives, their health, their education, their housing and also the practice of their culture. It just makes sense because when you listen to people you get better outcomes. That is what treaty is: a practical way to achieve practical change.

We have been working through how to embed truth-telling for a long time and building on the nation-leading work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and we are keeping the community involved every step of the way through the joint statements that we have been releasing, the treaty forums and the conversations that are happening across the state, reaching hundreds of community leaders. I want to thank the member for Geelong for her continued leadership and support in sharing the message of treaty right across Victoria.

We are putting reconciliation into action, and treaty is at the heart of that work because all the evidence here and overseas shows that when First Peoples have a genuine voice it works. It closes the gap, it improves outcomes and it changes lives. It is how we build a Victoria that everyone can celebrate and take pride in. I hope those opposite can find it within themselves to stand with First Peoples during this reconciliation week, and every week, because this is more than just a slogan. It is a responsibility. It is a promise. And on this side of the house we take that seriously.

#### **Homelessness**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. On 2 April I raised the urgent case of my constituent, a young mother with two small children facing the terrifying prospect of sleeping on the streets. The Premier assured the house that if provided her details she would 'examine

this matter further to see what more could be done' and 'seek further advice from the Minister for Housing'. Following the Premier's response in the chamber, I hand-delivered a letter with my constituent's details to her office as requested to ensure prompt attention. After six weeks without any response, I followed up seeking an update. The reply I received said 'The issues in your email are of importance to the Premier' and advised me that if I was 'experiencing homelessness or at risk of homeless you can get help by calling 1800 825 955'. The Premier gave a public assurance in this chamber that she would look into this matter. What actions has she taken to assist this family?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): In thanking the member for Ringwood for his question, I will confirm this advice formally outside of the chamber, but the advice I have received from my office is that the individual constituent matter he has referred to has been followed up with the individual concerned. If the member for Ringwood has any further information he would like to provide, we can follow that up outside of this chamber.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (14:25): That addresses the process part of the matter, but it does not address the substantive part. What action has the Premier taken to ensure that the needs of this constituent are in fact being met?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:26): I am sure members of the house would appreciate that I am not going to divulge personal details about an individual, particularly one who is experiencing housing vulnerability and may indeed be vulnerable in this circumstance. I am just not going to do that, and I would hope the member for Ringwood would appreciate that.

#### Ministers statements: economy

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:26): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is growing the economy, creating jobs and backing Victorian families, because if your economic plan does not help with cost of living or does not create jobs or ease pressure on working people then, frankly, it is not much of a plan at all. That is exactly why we launched the \$150 million Victorian Investment Fund: to back industries that will help shape our future and support local businesses to expand, invest and employ. We have also carved out \$50 million just for regional Victoria because we want growth to reach every single town and indeed every single community.

While others sit on the sidelines talking down our economy, our government has Victoria's back, working on innovative solutions to supercharge economic growth, like our Targeted Global Talent Attraction Fund, for example, because I want to make sure that as a state we are drawing the very best and brightest to come here to Victoria. Since 2016 our startup sector has grown 26-fold – now worth \$132 billion, outpacing some of the world's largest tech hubs. Frankly, we will not be stopping there. We are undertaking a review of every part of our innovation and commercialisation system and entities to make sure they deliver results that matter: good jobs, stronger local industries and better outcomes.

Victorians know the Allan Labor government has their back. We are focused on what matters and we are planning for the future, with a clear plan for jobs, growth and cost-of-living relief. Victorians know what the alternative is: a Liberal Party with no answers, no plans and no mention of families in their budget speeches, just a black hole full of secret cuts they will not come clean on. While we back families, they leave them behind. While we are planning for the future, we know the Liberal Party are just stuck in the past, continuing to wage war against each other.

#### Congestion levy

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (14:28): My question is to the Premier. Labor's increased congestion levy will push the average cost to park around Melbourne and surrounding suburbs up by thousands of dollars a year. Businesses are already under pressure from Labor's mismanagement of crime and tax increases, including along Chapel Street. Why is Labor slugging Melbourne workers, hitting small businesses in places like the CBD and Chapel Street, during a cost-of-living crisis?

*Members interjecting.*

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Frankston said a really disparaging remark, and I would ask you to ask him to withdraw.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Frankston, is that accusation correct?

**Paul Edbrooke:** That accusation is incorrect.

**The SPEAKER:** I will review the footage.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:29): I thank the member for Prahran for her question, and actually this provides me with an opportunity to provide some information to both the member for Prahran and the house about the work that the government is doing to get more cars off the road, bring more people in and out of the city on public transport and, yes, look at the congestion levy arrangements here in this state to ensure that they are equivalent to and consistent with the rates that are currently set in Sydney. There is work that is being led by the Treasurer on this matter, who is working and consulting with the relevant industry groups. But one of the challenges of getting people in and out of the CBD and the inner city is of course the availability of road space and the availability of getting cars off our roads, because we know a big choke on productivity is getting stuck in traffic and road congestion. One of the ways to address that is, as I have said, the congestion levy, which has been in place for some time, and we are looking at equalising those arrangements with Sydney.

But of course one of the substantial ways of getting cars off our roads is the opening of the Metro Tunnel later this year, because the Metro Tunnel will have the capacity to bring half a million additional people in and out of the city every single week. When you have a comprehensive approach to addressing the congestion challenges in the city –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it is a very narrow question about taxing Victorians more in a cost-of-living crisis with a congestion levy. I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that question.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** You have to look at the different mechanisms and levers you have available as a government to address this important issue. I know from talking to small businesses in the city and the inner suburbs that having people get to their front door is important to them. By substantially increasing public transport and making public transport free for kids from next year – that will make it easy as well – we are recognising that with the long-established mechanism of a congestion levy, which has been in place in Melbourne for some time and has been in place in Sydney for some time, there is the opportunity to equalise those rates with Sydney but at the same time substantially invest in our public transport network, making it free for kids, making it free for seniors on the weekend and increasing substantially the number of services that are coming in and out of the city every single day. I appreciate those opposite do not understand this. They took money out of the Metro Tunnel. They have opposed the Metro Tunnel at every opportunity. Well, it will open later this year.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, not only is the Premier required to be factual, she is also required to be relevant to the question. The question is very narrow about her hikes to the congestion levy in the city and Chapel Street.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant. The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) (14:33): The Premier spoke about the fact that there is already an existing levy. The levy currently makes up 40 to 50 per cent of the average price of parking. It is going to go up 80 per cent. How much more will Victorians pay because of this tax increase?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:33): I am going to politely disagree with the member for Prahran and the statement in her question and just reiterate the point that I made earlier:

that we are harmonising our congestion levy rates to be consistent with Sydney. It is a levy that has been in place for some time. Those opposite did not find it so offensive when they were in government, but that is okay. Those opposite have said a lot this week about how they would reduce revenue but have not said what they would cut – not one thing about what they would cut, what they would close, what they would privatise.

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, on debating, the Premier is clearly debating the question. There is a \$3 billion cut in her own budget.

**The SPEAKER:** Points of order need to be raised in the correct manner. I am becoming a little disappointed with the way points of order are being raised in the house. I encourage members to read the standing orders. Premier, I ask you to come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** We will continue to invest in frontline services, provide real cost-of-living support and also invest in public transport so more people can get to Prahran or Preston on our great public transport network.

**Bridget Vallance:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it is a very narrow question about how much more Victorians will pay because of this tax increase. It is \$308 million in the budget update. I would ask you to ask the Premier to be relevant to the question.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind the Manager of Opposition Business of the correct way to raise a point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

### Ministers statements: budget 2025–26

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35): Victorians in difficult, challenging times expect their leaders and their government to be on their side, to stand up for them, to help ease their pressure, not add to it, and to back families in, not just back in themselves. In our Labor government that is exactly what we are doing.

Let me run through the examples. There is free public transport for kids everywhere every day, and not only that, we are also going to help the grandparents get to see the grandkids with free travel for seniors every weekend right across the state. There is the work that we are doing to get young people into a home – helping young people buy their first home, start a family and build their long-term wealth. There is that fantastic initiative, free care at the chemist – being able to go and get treated for more conditions at your local chemist or pharmacy, avoiding a trip to the GP, saving time and money, and for people and families, getting care sooner as well. There is the help with school costs that the Deputy Premier has been working on, there is the increase to the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and there are the Get Active Kids vouchers, making sure that kids are not missing out on those important experiences and opportunities. Then of course the SEC is back, that one-stop shop helping to reduce energy bills and backed with the power saving bonus as well, providing important relief through the winter period.

We know families and working people are counting every dollar. Every dollar counts, and they are looking to government for support, not to be overlooked. The member for Brighton did not mention families, children or parents once yesterday. We are on the side of working people and families, and we will back them every day.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Eildon electorate**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (14:39): (1150) I have a question for the Minister for Agriculture. The Murrindindi and Mansfield shires are suffering from drought conditions. There has been hardly any rain, which means paddocks are bare, dams are empty and hay supplies are diminished. Record numbers of cattle are being sold through the Yea saleyards as farmers are forced to sell their stock as drought conditions worsen. Our farmers need help, but so far all they have received from the Labor

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government is the news that they are not included in the government's drought support package. Can the minister explain why the state government excluded farmers in Mansfield and Murrindindi shires from the recently announced expansion of their drought support program despite being in worse drought conditions than other locations receiving it? Funding assistance is urgently needed for farmers in my district, and as you can appreciate, these terrible conditions take an enormous toll on their mental health.

### **Narre Warren South electorate**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (14:39): (1151) My constituency question is for the Minister for Creative Industries and concerns the Creative Neighbourhoods Infrastructure Support Program. Minister, how does this program support creatives and the broader community in my electorate of Narre Warren South? I know that the mechanics hall in Narre Warren was recently transformed into an artists hub, and I know that artists need the required space to create. As someone who was once and is still very interested in the creative industries, I also understand the impact that the arts have on the wellbeing and the social fabric of our community. So to that end, I am pleased that our Labor government also recognises this impact and is committed to supporting our artists to develop and share their work for the benefit of our community. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

### **Gippsland East electorate**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:40): (1152) My constituency question is to the Minister for Agriculture, and the action that I seek is whether the minister will consider including areas like Omeo and Benambra in the drought relief package. A drought relief package, as we know, was announced in recent weeks. Whilst the majority of my area is pretty well off compared to the rest of the state – the coastal area is quite green – up above the area known as the Gap, just north of Swifts Creek, we have some very, very dry conditions. I would ask the minister to please consider including that area, and the information that I seek is whether she is doing that.

### **Kororoit electorate**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (14:41): (1153) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. What initiatives have the Allan Labor government introduced to strengthen and promote music and the arts education across schools in the Kororoit electorate? This question is inspired by the outstanding achievements of a local student Emeli Valu, a year 9 student at Victoria University Secondary College. Emeli is an exceptional young musician and a proud ambassador for both her school and the community. Emeli recently performed both the Australian and the New Zealand national anthems at her school's Anzac Day service, an impressive contribution that reflects her deep commitment to honouring our shared history. Beyond her school, Emeli is an active member of the 405 air cadet squadron in Sunshine and was invited to sing the New Zealand national anthem at the Caroline Springs Anzac Day dawn service, which I was at. She also plays the first flute and piccolo in the honours band and proudly represented her school at the Australian National Band Championships during the Easter break. To Emeli, congratulations. You are an inspiration to your peers and our community.

### **Caulfield electorate**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:42): (1154) My question is to the Minister for Education. Once again it seems Labor is playing politics with education and educating future generations. They are not interested in many of our young people and many of our schools that are really struggling at the moment. We see that in this particular budget Caulfield South is only being funded their dollars after the next election. So it seems Labor wants to be the Education State only in an election year, not every other time. My question is: when will the minister stop playing politics with education and properly fund the schools in Caulfield? Schools like Glen Eira College, Caulfield Primary School,

Ripponlea Primary School and Caulfield Junior College did not receive one dollar in this year's budget. Enough is enough. These schools need to be properly funded.

**Sunbury electorate**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (14:43): (1155) My question is to the Minister for Community Sport. Minister, how many families in my electorate have benefited from the Get Active Kids voucher program? As members of the house know, this is a terrific program that goes a long way to helping support local families and young people to get on the field, to play their sport of choice and to make sure that we are providing for that very necessary equipment and registration fees and the like that help our young people and those throughout local communities do their very best whilst playing sport. The program makes a real difference, as you and other members know. I was absolutely delighted that there was an additional \$15 million allocated in the last budget on top of what this government is already rolling out. I look forward to the minister's response and thank and acknowledge her for her hard work in this space right across our state.

**Rowville electorate**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (14:44): (1156) My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I ask on behalf of many frustrated school communities: when will the Allan Labor government deliver funding for vital upgrades to the schools within my Rowville electorate? The recent state budget revealed that Carrington Primary School at Knoxfield is finally receiving funding originally promised as a 2022 state election commitment. Budget papers show that \$3.5 million will be spent next financial year. However, that leaves a funding deficit of nearly \$10 million. Not one cent further has been allocated in the budget. Not one cent has been allocated to schools that are in need of upgrades – Scoresby and Rowville secondary colleges, schools that have been neglected for years. Nothing to schools such as Scoresby, Rowville, Lysterfield, Heany Park, Park Ridge, Karoo and Knox Park.

**Laverton electorate**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:45): (1157) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. One of the key cost-of-living measures that has been introduced in this year's state budget is that our government from 1 January next year will be making travel on public transport free for all Victorians under the age of 18 – I mean, seriously, how good is that? That means that all kids, whether they are travelling on buses, trams or trains, will not have to pay to get around Victoria. When I first heard that we would be doing this it was a surprise, to be sure, but gosh, it was a welcome one. As someone who has two kids at school who rely on public transport to get to and from school, I know how costly it can be for families to pay for their kids to travel on a daily basis. That is why I know that this measure is not only a relief for thousands of families here in Victoria, but it is also the right thing to do. I ask the minister this: what will the average family, including those in my electorate of Laverton, save from making PT free for our kids?

**Mildura electorate**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:46): (1158) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Environment and comes from Hamish, who is a sheep grazier with a thousand acres south of Underbool. He says, 'I just love my sheep.' Every day he is having to deal with the trauma of wild dog attacks. Hamish is also suffering extreme mental health issues due to having to see his sheep with their intestines out, mauled and dying daily. He has tried to raise it with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and has spoken to other farmers, but no solution is helping, such as donkeys, llamas, fencing et cetera. He is also a shearer, and while shearing recently found that about one in every three lambs had a dog bite and needed to be put down on neighbouring properties also. Hamish asks: how will the minister commit to helping farmers in the north-west with the wild dogs who are slaughtering his sheep daily, which may also help with the mental stress adding to farmers already doing it tough in the Mallee?

**Mulgrave electorate**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (14:47): (1159) My constituency question is to the Minister for Community Sport. How is construction progressing on the upgrades at Springvale Reserve? Last week I toured ongoing works at Springvale Reserve in Mulgrave with a member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region in the other place, Michael Galea. We witnessed the impressive progress of the Victorian Labor government's \$2 million investment into the reserve, which includes 150-lux LED lighting and two coaches boxes on the oval; two acrylic-surface netball courts with 200-lux LED lighting; player and scorers shelters; goalposts and fencing; a new local playground, including a play tower, swings, rocker and cubby; refurbishment of the existing pavilion kitchen and installation of new servery windows. Community sport is vital for the Mulgrave community, and I am proud of the government's continued support of our local clubs, such as the Springvale Districts Football Netball Club.

**Bridget Vallence:** Speaker, on a point of order, yet again I am raising a number of questions that are overdue for being answered. There are 10 overdue questions to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. They are questions on notice 2304, 2305, 2306, 2307, 2308, 2309, 2311, 2312, 2313 and 2314. I think I have raised this point of order previously. I would really appreciate a response for my constituents, and I will email the list to the clerks.

**Martin Cameron:** On a point of order, Speaker, I also have some unanswered questions. Could I get you to follow up, please, questions 1985, 2031, 2195, 2196 and 2197.

**Will Fowles:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have some unanswered questions: constituency question 986 to the Minister for Housing and Building, which was due on 20 March; question on notice 2181 to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, due 1 May; and adjournment debate 1077 to the Premier, which was due on 18 April.

**Bills****State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:50): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.****Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.****Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025****Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motions of Danny Pearson and Mary-Anne Thomas:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (14:50): I am delighted to continue my contribution on the budget appropriation bills and note that this has been an outstanding budget for the electorate of Footscray and in particular my passion for upgrading every government school in my electorate of Footscray. Yesterday I spoke about the \$493,000 contribution that is going to be provided to Yarraville West Primary School, and I have worked closely with the school council and with the principal Karen at the school to prioritise this project. Anyone who knows this school community knows that the entry to the

school is right on the footpath. They really need a secure entry to the school, new first aid bay facilities and a new foyer entry for this wonderful government school in my electorate of Footscray. In addition to that, the Maribyrnong College commitment for planning funding out of a \$10 million allocation within this budget means that Maribyrnong College, whose school council and principal have been working tirelessly to look at the academic buildings that are onsite and what needs to be upgraded, have secured planning funding in this year's budget.

One of the most exciting things that is happening in my community of Footscray this year of course is the opening of the new Footscray Hospital. It is a \$1.5 billion investment in the most world-class infrastructure for our community –

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Katie HALL:** it is \$1.5 billion, member for Frankston – and in this year's budget there was more than \$300 million allocated for that hospital to get going, which means that it will be operational and the new emergency department and the wonderful mental health facilities that will be at that new hospital can get operational.

In addition to that, I have been working hard with the Minister for Public and Active Transport to make sure that people can get to the hospital via public transport. We have a fantastic tramline in the 82, heading up Droop Street, and I was delighted that \$26 million has been allocated for four sets of accessible tram stops on this line, from Droop Street through to Gordon Street. The new tram facilities will be an absolute game changer for our community. Whether you are going to Footscray High, Footscray Hospital, Maribyrnong College or Highpoint, the entire line will be serviced by these new next-generation trams. I am delighted that we will now be building the infrastructure that we consulted with our community on and that we are now delivering accessible tram stops, so if you have got a pram or if you are in a wheelchair, you will be able to get on the tram along Droop Street and Gordon Street and get to where you need to go.

It has been a fantastic budget, not just for the health infrastructure but also for our emergency services infrastructure in Footscray. We all know how hard the Footscray SES worked during the Maribyrnong floods. The Maribyrnong floods were devastating for my community, and floods have a really long tail. There are still people in Maribyrnong who are trying to recover from the devastating impacts of that flood event. One thing we know for sure is that the Footscray SES were there when we needed them most, and for a long time I have been working within government to advocate for new facilities for that SES unit. Last budget we secured the planning money, and I am delighted that in this budget we have secured \$14.5 million for new headquarters for the Footscray SES. Of course the Footscray SES also covers the City of Melbourne. They do a power of work. I am delighted that they will have a new home in Maidstone, and I know that they are also very pleased down at the Footscray SES that they will be receiving these new facilities.

One of the things I have been working on as the member for Footscray and as someone whose office is in the heart of Footscray is that there are a number of people who are experiencing disadvantage, homelessness, and drug and alcohol addiction – a small number of people who really need help. After the tragic shooting that happened in Footscray a couple of months ago now, we know that acute mental health situations need to be dealt with by experts in mental health. So I went to the Premier and I asked for assistance. One of the things I modelled an idea of assistance on was the work that happens between Cohealth and the Salvos in the city – we know it is really effective. We already have Cohealth doing brilliant work on alcohol and other drugs outreach in Footscray. They have a clinic that supports people experiencing homelessness and of course the very well loved former trade union clinic on Paisley Street.

I am really pleased that \$350,000 was allocated in this budget for specialist homelessness outreach service providers to work within the heart of Footscray. I have been working with Maribyrnong council on renting a location in Footscray where people can come in and have the dignity of getting



help and getting a shower and getting their clothes washed. If they need connection to Centrelink, housing services or alcohol and other drug services, those helps can be triaged there with a warm meal and with kindness and empathy, and police can continue to do their important work in central Footscray. So I am very pleased that \$350,000 has been allocated to that project that I proposed. I look forward to the EOI process providing a suitable service provider to deliver that outcome in Footscray.

One of the great things about the budget outcomes over previous years is that 2025 is going to be a magnificent year for the people of Footscray. We have the West Gate Tunnel opening, we have the Metro Tunnel opening and of course we have the new Footscray Hospital opening. The new tram depot is almost completed, and we will have the new 82 tram, the G-class low-floor tram, operating throughout Footscray. This work takes time. Over a number of years I have been advocating for these different budget outcomes, and I am really pleased that in this year's budget we have secured the funding to get those things done.

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:59): It is my pleasure to rise and make a contribution on the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 or give a budget reply, as it is more commonly known. I will start off by saying you are never going to get a good budget when you have a government of the day that has spent beyond its means, and that is clearly what this government has done. You cannot have a good budget when the government's own figures show that we are headed for a state debt of over \$194 billion, which means interest repayments of \$1.2 million an hour. That equates or extrapolates out to \$28 million a day or a billion dollars every six weeks in interest repayments.

The Minister for Finance was in here yesterday and described the government as being fiscally responsible. He deadset should be a stand-up comedian if he thinks that is the case. I would like to see him try and sell that story on any street corner anywhere in this state. The fact is that no matter what members on that side stand up and say about what they got in the budget for their local area, the bottom line is the government has completely stuffed this state's finances. I have heard some MPs on that side that have made contributions talking about a new toilet block they got, or they might have got an intersection upgrade or a new extension to their school or whatever it is. But the bottom line is that the finances have been completely mismanaged to a degree that it will take decades for this state to get its finances back on track.

Ministers have also spoken about funding in their portfolios. Technically, every health, roads and education budget should be record funding. CPI increases and population growth would dictate that every year, in every budget, if we are keeping pace with those measures, we should have record funding allocated. So there should always be record funding, but we do not even have that in a number of these key portfolios. We have seen budget cuts as the government tries to rein in this massive, massive debt that it has incurred, all the while continually striking new taxes to pay for that spiralling debt. I was out at the rally on budget day on the steps of the Parliament last week, and amongst everybody that was there – the thousands that were there – there was one sign being held up that resonated with me. It said 'Spending more than you have, Jacinta, then expecting us to pay'. How true is that. This is really what we have here.

In 2014 this government inherited a debt of less than \$20 billion, and it was a debt that was reducing. It blames, to a large degree, COVID for the current state of our finances, and that is just not right. COVID accounts for one-third of our current debt; the rest you can put down to mismanagement. All other states went through COVID as well. It is not an excuse, it is just a simple fact that other states managed it better. Other states have not had the billions in cost overruns on projects. So we should be spared the commentary of 'I got a toilet block or an intersection or an extension to my school'. What we want to know from people standing up over there is how they are going to pay off the \$192 billion in debt that we are headed to. That is what we want to know. That is what Victorians want to know. Let us not talk about minuscule surpluses, let us talk about paying off what we owe, because that is what is important.

Let us talk about interest repayments for a moment. Let us just forget the debt; we will put the debt to the side, and we will simply talk about interest repayments – \$1.2 million per hour in interest alone. \$1.2 million per hour would build a fire station every 3 to 4 hours, and I need at least two new ones in my electorate. It would build a new police station every 5 to 10 hours, and I need a couple of those in my electorate, at Maffra and at Orbost. And it would build a new country hospital every week or so just on interest repayments.

Imagine what it would do for our roads. Builders have told me – and admittedly this advice is maybe a fraction out of date – that about a kilometre of new road equals about a million dollars, so let us just use that measure for the sake of this argument. That means every day we could repair 26 kilometres of road on the interest repayments alone. Every week we could repair and rebuild 200 kilometres of road on interest repayments alone. And get this: with one year of interest repayments we could fix 10,000 kilometres of road. Yet members on the other side want to stand up and talk about what good financial and fiscal managers they are. Page 135 of budget paper 5 covers a measure about the road surface area that is treated in regional Victoria. Last year the government target was a little over a million square kilometres. Less than 10 per cent of last year's target was done – unbelievable. The roads are not that good that we can afford to have another budget cut in this space. The road area to be resurfaced has also been cut on both what was budgeted for and what was delivered. So what was budgeted for is one figure, but what was actually delivered was far less, and now we have got another cut on that reduced figure that was delivered.

Moving on from roads, we missed out on the fire stations and the police stations I have spoken about. There are also cuts to regional development, cuts to our agriculture budget in a period of drought for much of the state and cuts to tourism. Even the things that will not cost money to fix were not fixed. The green element of the bureaucracy is leaving many of our home owners in rural and regional Victoria without firewood this winter. The government was warned about this time and time again. We simply do not have enough, and because we are not giving people access to the bush to collect firewood – and the current season closes in a few weeks – we are going to have low-income earners and pensioners freezing this winter because they simply cannot afford the inflated prices of buying their firewood off commercial contractors. The government touts its \$100 power saving bonus. That is going to do nothing for these people that need access to cheap firewood. It is just ridiculous, and it is an easy fix. Let people into the bush; let commercial contractors into the bush to be able to provide our householders with affordable firewood over winter.

The government has spoken about there being no cuts to frontline staff. Fisheries officers: are they not frontline staff? I mean, seriously, what do we call them if they are not frontline staff? The Victorian Fisheries Authority has come out – I know a couple of the boys in the Victorian Fisheries Authority – and for a few years they have been trumpeting and spouting that there are a million recreational anglers in Victoria. The Target One Million program – we all remember that. So we have got a million recreational anglers. The Victorian Fisheries Authority has come out and said 90 per cent of anglers do the right thing. So that means we have got 100,000 anglers who are not doing the right thing. That is their figure; that is their commentary. A million recreational anglers, 90 per cent do the right thing, so we have got 100,000 that do not. So what is our response to the 100,000 anglers? That is a fair few, I am sure you would agree, that are not doing the right thing. Well, we cut fisheries officers. As I said, I know a couple of those boys in the fisheries department, and they would not have done this without budget pressures. They know the value of our fisheries officers, but they have been put in a position where they have to cut their budget. Our communities suffer when those frontline services disappear. We lose workers in our area, people who have families, their kids at primary school, support our local economies; their jobs are gone.

Let us look at the emergency services tax for a moment. We have the Premier saying that the emergency services tax is for volunteers. Well, those volunteers on the steps of Parliament last week were not saying thank you. They know that this new tax is to service debt; they know that. On one hand we have a Premier – and I have heard her in this place – saying we need to be aware of climate

change and we need to be supporting our communities. But if that is the case then we have got to provide appropriate drought relief to our communities. The level of drought relief that has been offered to our farmers in the majority of the state has been quite pathetic when you compare it to what farmers are able to access over the border in South Australia. You cannot have it both ways. If we are going to support communities in relation to climate change, we have got to support the farmers in drought. They go hand in hand; they are one and the same thing. I would also encourage – and I have done a constituency question on this today – the minister to consider some of the areas not currently included in drought provisions, like the Omeo–Benambra area of my electorate, and have them included.

We have got cuts to the feral animal control programs. We have had calls to the office this week saying that the one feral pig controller – who is busier than a one-armed bricklayer in Baghdad at the moment, trying to keep the pigs under control – has lost his job. He has lost his job. He has been servicing that rural community in north-east Victoria – I can tell you that the feral pig numbers are absolutely out of control – and he has not been recontracted. That is a huge issue for those farmers up there. ‘No frontline services,’ they say, ‘We’re not cutting any of them.’ What is this bloke if he is not a frontline service provider?

A lot was said about the school student free travel. We have one public bus in Bairnsdale, which operates outside school hours. I have been lobbying for a long time for an extra V/Line service out of Bairnsdale in the morning. We have one that leaves at 4:27, and the next one does not leave till early afternoon. We have got a huge gap there for a major country town, which can easily be fixed. Many of our people who have appointments in Melbourne have been asking for a mid-morning service, and it just has not been delivered.

In summary, let us just have a look at our state of play. We have got a debt heading towards \$200 billion. We have got interest out of control on that debt at \$1.2 million an hour – just an incredible level of disaster in servicing that debt. Jurisdictions around the country when they have a high level of debt often sit back and say, ‘Yes, we’ve spent a lot of money, but look what we’ve got to show for it.’ Well, let us have a look at what we have got to show for our debt. We have got a road system that is falling apart, with freight companies and bus drivers saying it is the worst they have ever seen it. We have a health system in crisis to show for our debt, we have a mental health system in crisis and we have utilities bills going through the roof. So we have not got a lot to show for our nearly \$200 billion in debt. This is not a good budget at all. It ignores the vast majority of the state and confirms that Victoria is a financial basket case heading for worse times. The government has to take some real action to start balancing the books, or our future generations will be paying for this for decades into the future.

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (15:13): I am absolutely pleased and excited to speak on the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 and of course the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025. I say that because there is a lot to be proud of in the fact that, understanding that there are significant pressures on Victorian families right across the state with cost-of-living pressures, this budget delivers record investment in providing immediate relief and support to Victorian families right across our state. It is about ensuring that we actually provide the assistance and use the balance sheet of our government to support the balance sheet of every family in this state. And it is about doing that at a time that those families need that support, not in five years time, not in 10 years time, but now – real relief when they need it the most. And it is about governments prioritising and focusing on the things that really matter most to Victorians. That is why this budget is a classic Labor budget. It is a classic Labor budget because it has at its very heart support for Victorians, ensuring that people are not left behind for a whole range of reasons out there, some of which are globally inspired and others not so much globally inspired but other circumstances that get in the way of Victorians being able to get by and do okay for themselves and their families. That is what Victorians want to be able to do – live a life, raise a family if they have children and ensure that they have the best opportunities available to them and possible for them.

That is a really important way for us to actually understand why budgets are designed the way this budget has been designed. The real help with the cost of living, focusing on what matters most to Victorian families – is it any wonder that free public transport for under-18s has been so well received by people in my community? I have done a lot of doorknocking since the budget was handed down just over a week and a half ago, and a number of people are actually relieved and happy to hear the news that if they have got children under 18 they will be able to travel any day of the week, seven days a week, anywhere in Victoria for free. The amount of money that stays within the family's budget that will not be now going out the door to pay for public transport will come as a welcome additional source of funds for the family to be able to deal with other challenges and costs that they have in their lives. We know that seniors are a really important part of our program of supporting people when they need it the most. Free weekend public transport for seniors statewide is about making it easier for people to connect with family members – and this is a really important way for us to do it – but also to be able to enjoy all of the offerings that are available across our state, whether it is going to parts of regional Victoria or coming into Melbourne to enjoy a lot of the free assets, the natural environment, that we have or indeed other things that we promote as a government.

I really do want to talk, importantly, about free pharmacy care. Our government has made so many firsts in public policy that are being copied – or borrowed, let me say – by other governments, including the federal government. Understanding the trust that people have in their local pharmacist, being able to go in there and get that hopefully simple advice that means that you do not actually have to go to the doctor – booking the doctor has out-of-pocket expenses – is a really important way to provide that cost-of-living relief. If we can reduce for many families who are struggling that choice between paying the doctor's bill or buying food for dinner that night – an awful choice that many families are faced with – then that is a good thing, because we want Victorians to be able to get the medical attention and care that they deserve and are entitled to and of course to be able to feed their families or pay other essential bills. Saving time, saving money on GP visits, making sure that more conditions can be treated by the well-qualified medical staff at the pharmacy is a really important way that we can deliver that real cost-of-living relief immediately when families need it.

We know that when kids go to school, in Victoria we have got a really fantastic school system, we have got great –

**A member** interjected.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** It is fantastic, absolutely. Our public school system is founded on the notion of free access to education, and that is really important. But to take part fully in all of the school activities can often mean, again, families are making the choices about whether they can afford to have their child go to that camp or that excursion or take part in a sporting event. We are increasing the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund payments to \$400 for eligible students, and that is going to go such a long way in meeting those additional costs that are a barrier for young kids to be able to fully participate in education – in all of the ways that they receive education – and sport and engagement and socialisation with their friends and other students is a really important way of providing education.

Certainly we have got more of the Get Active Kids vouchers. They go such a long way. There are 65,000 of them for concession card holders – a really well designed, targeted program that goes to those people, again, who are the most in need. We know that sport can play a really critical role in the way that young people, young kids, can actually build up their own confidence in terms of their own physical exercise. And if they are not the greatest sportsperson, who cares? They can go out there, do their best and get some exercise. It is great for their physical health and great for their mental health, and it is a great opportunity to break down barriers, because families often accompany their young kids to those sporting events. They sit down and meet other families, strike up friendships and support networks, share their experiences of how they are getting by and support and encourage each other. That is about building communities.

On this side of the house we believe in communities. We believe in the power of people coming together and working together, improving themselves and their communities and being in harmony, because that goes such a long way in the respect and the value that we place on each other as humans in a communal sense. All of that is really important because all of these things are not just individual elements of cost-of-living relief, but taken together they are well targeted to ensure that during the toughest of times Labor will always be on the side of those families. During the toughest of times we will be on the side of every family.

That is why I am really pleased also that the power saving bonus – the fifth round of the power saving bonus – is returning. That will enable those people who are on a concession card to apply for a \$100 power saving bonus from around August this year. That is when they get their gas bill in particular, their energy bills. We know that winter bills are really tough, especially during cold winters, and we can already feel the cold of this winter starting up. So giving that additional relief will go such a long way for Victorian families who need it the most to be able to make ends meet. We do not want them choosing between paying an energy bill and putting food on the table or buying breakfast.

Just on that front, there is the continuation of the breakfast clubs in all the public schools, and I do want to mention last year's budget, which basically means that from 1 July every government school will be eligible to have a breakfast club. I have visited a number of the schools in my electorate, and they go down so well. And again, there is no shame; there are no questions asked. Kids come, they get dropped off, they sit there and sometimes one of the parents or the carers might come in too and have a bite to eat, no questions asked. And that is how it should be. Everyone should have pride in the way that they engage in our community, the way they raise their children and the way they can support their children. If we can lend a hand, that is exactly what we should be doing, and that is exactly what we are doing.

There are many other things of course, including additional support for food relief. We have heard loud and clear from many of the food relief providers across the state. There are far more Victorians seeking help than ever before because of a lot of pressures, whether it is mortgage stress or whether it is the inflationary pressures of grocery prices and how that impacts and contributes to the stress around paying bills. Getting that emergency food relief is so important. But we know that a lot of these providers do more than that too. They actually lend an ear. They are looking at expanding their services and providing greater education opportunities – learning how to cook, learning how to perhaps grow their own food. All of these are ancillary, but they enable Victorians to have a plan about how they can get on top of the cost pressures that they are under, so that hopefully they come in and out of that really stressful situation when they so desperately need relief. But for those that may be in it longer term for a whole range of reasons, we will always be there to provide support when they need it.

Investing more in frontline services is really critical. We know that in early childhood education, continuing that free kinder is saving families up to \$2600 a year on fees per child. There are free TAFE, upgrades and new schools.

There are many here and I will not touch on all of them, but certainly I do want to touch on the roads and potholes. Again, there is record funding for the better roads blitz to fix potholes and resurface roads. All of these things are moving along really well and are being well received.

I want to do a shout-out on some of the other commitments that we have made to the local community in the Mill Park electorate. From this budget we have committed \$200,000 to constructing two new cricket nets at Mill Park Lakes Recreation Reserve. The South Morang Cricket Club, a fantastic group of people – volunteers that do such good work – were absolutely excited to get this news. The South Morang Football Netball Club we are providing with \$150,000 towards a significant upgrade to the kitchen facilities. Those facilities are shared between the netball, football and cricket clubs, and everyone is going to benefit from that. These are all champions, these people. They are all volunteers, and they provide more than sport; they provide real comradeship. I say that in the most genuine of terms because these sporting clubs are often the second family for a lot of people in our community; I

can tell you that is exactly what the South Morang Cricket Club and the South Morang Football Netball Club are in the area of Mill Park, South Morang et cetera.

We are also providing \$250,000, matched with the same contribution from the City of Whittlesea, to do a massive upgrade of the lighting at the west oval of that same recreation reserve. That is going to go such a long way to enabling women's football and men's football to play extended hours so that there is fairness in the way that that reserve can be utilised. Construction of new 100-lux LED lighting in this project includes light tower crossarms that allow space for additional lamps to be installed in future years, with the goal of upgrading lights to 150 lux.

I want to thank all of the committee members: president of the cricket club Dean Parker, secretary Bree Slater, treasurer Janine Slater, junior president Darren Slater, assistant treasurer Sarah Watson – yes, there are families that run these clubs, and this is what we have got here – and of course the football and netball club chair Gary Kallinikos, secretary Mark Stefanile, treasurer Nick McIntyre, football operations manager Mark Muscat, senior football president Grant Pell, senior vice-president Damon Lansfield, junior football president Marco Volpe and junior vice-president Vince Alessandrino. All of these people and more are the lifeblood of the community, and I really do want to thank them for their advocacy. They have been really clear about what their needs have been, and this will go such a long way to supporting all members of those clubs.

We have also got upgrades that will be coming to our bus networks locally, so members of the community in the Wollert area of my electorate will see new bus services delivered for the first time.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (15:28): I rise to give the Greens budget reply speech for the 2025–26 budget handed down by the Victorian Allan Labor government.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ellen SANDELL:** You are daring me to go for an hour? All right. State budgets outline government's priorities and what they think is important or, to adopt this government's by-line, what they think matters most. Conversely, budgets also tell us about what governments think are less important or what this Labor government thinks matters least. The Treasurer's speech is a good place to start, to look and see what this Labor government thinks is a priority or is not. Guess how many times the Treasurer mentioned the words 'climate change' in her speech? Zero. I have said 'climate change' in my speech more times than the Treasurer did in her entire speech. This says a lot. Look at what is happening in New South Wales right now: historic one-in-500-year floods east of the Great Dividing Range, historic drought to the west of it, drought across large swathes of Victoria and South Australia – and yet climate change does not rate a single mention in the Treasurer's speech. It should be a top-line priority for every government, in every state, in every country, in every budget, every time.

The Treasurer also did not refer to the environment once in her speech, unless you count her mention of the business environment. That is despite the fact that Victoria is in an extinction crisis. It was recently revealed that we have over 2000 threatened species and ecosystems in Victoria, and the latest state of the environment report showed that most of our biodiversity indicators are poor and declining. In a budget where Labor says it is focused on what matters most, the absence of any mention of climate change or any mention of the environment is telling. It tells us that Labor does not want to take the bold, urgent action on the climate and ecological crisis that is demanded by the science – that this is not and will never be a top priority for Labor governments.

That is exactly why I am proud to represent the Greens, because for us these things are a top priority. Leaving a livable planet for future generations for us is a top priority. Protecting the environment, which we actually rely on to breathe the air and drink the water that keeps us alive is a top priority. Taking action to ensure we actually have a stable climate to live in – these are top priorities for us and they always will be. These are the very reasons why I got into politics in the first place, because I knew that Labor and Liberal and National governments would never put climate change and the environment

at the top of their priority list. Labor's budget, and the fact the Treasurer did not even mention climate change or the environment once in it, is an example of that.

At a time when scientists are telling us that we urgently, immediately need to move away from fossil fuels, the statement of finances in this Labor budget made it very clear – it says in this document – that Labor is committed to fast-track new fossil fuel gas developments in Victoria off our coastline. That is exactly the opposite of what the science tells us we should be doing if we care about protecting ourselves, our kids and our grandkids from climate catastrophe. Labor's budget also does little to help us adapt to the climate change that is already in the system. A recent parliamentary inquiry heard evidence that our government needs to do so much more to protect the community and help us adapt to the warming and extreme weather conditions that are already baked into the system.

When it comes to nature and our beautiful natural environment here in Victoria, we have had several years of cuts to biodiversity environment programs, which this budget does nothing to restore. The small amounts of funding that we see in this budget for nature are actually only there as a result of the Greens putting forward our budget bids to the government, such as two more years of funding for the Landcare program. Funding for Landcare, which funds facilitators to assist volunteer community groups to look after and restore our precious environment, as well as small grants for these groups to do the work that governments really should be doing – this should be a top priority. Yet Landcare's funding was going to lapse in this budget. The Greens advocated to the government to continue and increase their funding, recognising that they have not had an increase in 10 years, meaning that we have 80 incredible people, Landcare facilitators, out there across the state who are stretched absolutely thin. They are having their hours cut back and they are working many unpaid hours to compensate. They have got very low wages and no job security. We are really pleased that our advocacy has given Landcare two more years of funding. But all the department would support in the budget bid they put up was two more years of business as usual, which shows just how hard it is to get environmental funding out of this Victorian Labor government.

We are also pleased to have negotiated with the government through our budget bids to restore annual funding for Trust for Nature, which was cut by about a quarter. Trust for Nature does crucial work securing legal covenants to permanently protect nature on private land. The Greens also received a commitment that Labor will fix eligibility issues with Trust for Nature's covenant account for vacant land, which will enable them to unlock \$2 million to place covenants on more private properties to permanently protect them for conservation purposes.

These three wins are proof of what can be achieved when the Greens have the balance of power in the upper house, where the government needs to negotiate with us and we can get better outcomes for people and the planet. But they also show just how hard we have to work to get Labor to fund anything to do with the environment and what would happen if the Greens were not here at all. When it comes to climate action, the Greens and many community groups have also been advocating to reincorporate ceiling insulation into the Victorian energy upgrades scheme. We have made this a key part of our ongoing negotiations with the government as well, and we are really pleased to see \$12 million in this budget to add subsidies for insulation in homes that do not have any insulation or have very little at the moment.

I want to acknowledge there are a couple of other really important initiatives in the budget when it comes to this transition around getting us off gas. There was a small amount of funding to plan the offshore wind targets and temporary expansion of the heat pump and hot-water upgrades. We acknowledge the Minister for Energy and Resources' fight to keep these programs in Victoria alive, and we know that we will need to do a lot more to get our economy off gas. The Greens are here and ready to do that work to assist the government to get homes off gas in Victoria.

Despite these exceptions, there really is little to no new funding for climate and nature in Labor's budget. For example, the budget has nothing to fund the national parks that Labor promised us all the way back in 2021 or the future parks Labor also promised after finally ending native forest logging in

Victoria. In fact year after year we see Labor cutting away frontline ecological and environmental organisations. Last year those cuts came down hard on Parks Victoria, which lost millions in funding around the same time they started a new organisational review. There was even a leak of an internal proposal to halve the number of services delivered by Parks Victoria, meaning a potential end to feral pest control, rubbish collection, the junior rangers program, bush kinder and more. Many of these programs have already been cut, and I have constituents contacting me all the time talking about how sad they are that their favourite junior ranger program or the rangers in their local national park have lost their jobs.

As we wait to see exactly what survives of Parks Victoria, it is now the Victorian Fisheries Authority's turn to be drastically cut. For months fishers and environmentalists alike have raised the alarm over the VFA's plan to restructure, which would get rid of around 70 frontline fisheries officer positions and replace them with less than 40 so-called engagement officers. Last week we heard that, in a small silver lining, Labor plans to partially back down on the overall cuts, but instead of losing 30 officers we will now lose 15. It might not be quite as bad, but Labor's restructure still risks two VFA stations, at Braeside and at Altona North, and this would be a really terrible outcome for both regional jobs and sustainable fisheries. There is an ideological shift going on right now. According to the performance statements in the budget, Labor still plans to halve the number of fisheries officers during priority fishing periods, a plan that reflects the evolving focus on community engagement as part of maintaining compliance.

Let us be clear what this means and what is actually going on: fisheries officers do the crucial and often thankless work of ensuring that people are not overfishing, that they are fishing according to the rules and not taking more than the law says they can, to ensure that our fisheries are sustainable into the future. But actually it does not seem Labor really gives a stuff about any of that, because what Labor wants to do is expand the number of people fishing. They want lots of people to go out and buy boats and fishing equipment to add to regional tourism, but they do not really give a stuff about the monitoring, about whether we are seeing overfishing or illegal fishing. In other words, they care about the money, but they do not care about the fisheries, the habitat, the environment or the sustainability that underpins our fisheries. And without all of that, our fisheries could collapse. It is an incredibly short-sighted approach, but it is actually not really surprising for this government to not be thinking into the long term. This change in staffing and ideology has been slammed across the board, by recreational fishers and environmentalists alike, because many recreational fishers actually do the right thing and want to make sure that other people are doing the right thing so that fisheries are sustainable into the future. The health of our marine ecosystem relies on these fisheries officers enforcing the rules, and they are proud of their work. Getting rid of them makes no sense unless you do not care about the marine environment. The Greens have written to the Minister for Environment about these plans before, and we reiterate our plea to stop the cuts to fisheries and to national parks.

When it comes to climate change, programs to increase insulation or encourage more renewable energy are great, but they mean little unless the government listens to the science and bans new fossil fuel projects. You cannot pour fuel on the fire with one hand while claiming to put it out with the other – that makes no sense whatsoever – and it is especially worrying in a year when Labor has to make some pretty big choices here in Victoria. For example, Labor is still considering approving Viva's gas import terminal in Corio Bay. Victoria drills for gas and exports it to other states because they have been sending theirs mostly offshore; now we are going to import it back for us to use. I mean, make that make sense. We send gas to Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales. Australia is the world's second-largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, all for next to no royalties, because we are at the end of the day a country that is pretty much run by fossil fuel companies.

There is not a better example of how much fossil fuel companies run this country than the decision that was just made about an hour ago. The Albanese Labor government has just made a decision to approve the expansion of the biggest and dirtiest fossil fuel project in Australia, Woodside's North West Shelf project in WA. This Woodside project will emit more emissions –



**Jess Wilson:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is in relation to the state budget, not happenings in Canberra.

**Ellen SANDELL:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the lead speaker of a party has licence to give a wideranging speech on the budget.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino):** It has been a wideranging debate. I draw the member back to the budget, but it has been a wideranging debate.

**Ellen SANDELL:** I was speaking about this budget paper right in front of me, where the Victorian Labor government say that they are committed to fast-tracking new gas developments here in Victoria, and I was relating that to climate change, which is affecting Victoria very much. The example of Labor governments, not just here in Victoria but around the country, approving new fossil fuel developments is very relevant to Victoria because we are the ones that are in drought, experiencing climate change right now. The Labor Albanese government has just approved an extension of Australia's biggest and dirtiest fossil fuel project, the Woodside North West Shelf gas project off the coast of WA. This is a project that will emit more than the equivalent of 12 new coal-fired power stations. This Woodside project will emit more than 10 times Australia's entire emissions. It is an absolute heart-wrenching disgrace that we have a Labor government that say they care about climate change but are happy to approve Woodside's absolute climate bomb. And we have Greg Bourne, who was an executive at BP, so hardly –

**Lily D'Ambrosio:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I know that we all have latitude in conversations and discussions in this house. I feel that this is now becoming a platform for the de facto federal member for Melbourne to enter the federal debate.

**Ellen SANDELL:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, as I said before, I am the lead speaker. I know that we have had a lot of speakers in between the Labor and Liberal lead speakers and me, but I am our lead speaker and the lead speaker actually has licence to give a wideranging debate. I have been relating it to the impacts of climate change on Victoria.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino):** There is latitude given to the lead speaker in the budget appropriation bill reply, and I will allow the member to continue. There is no point of order.

**Ellen SANDELL:** I will just make a few more remarks on this issue. Greg Bourne, who was a former executive at BP – hardly an environmental company – said that Labor have just approved one of the most polluting fossil fuel projects in a generation, fuelling climate chaos for decades to come. This is criminal; there is actually no other way to talk about it. And I hope that –

**Lily D'Ambrosio:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am sorry, but I really do take issue with the fact that the member is trying to use this debate to attribute actions of a federal government to the Victorian Parliament or this budget. The two are absolutely unrelated. There is not even a tangential relationship.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino):** Can the member for Melbourne please come back to the state.

**Ellen SANDELL:** I would just say that I think this decision is criminal, and I do not know how Labor members can sleep at night knowing that their kids and grandkids will have to bear the consequences of this decision. But bringing it back to the Victorian budget, budgets are about choices; they are about choosing what matters. And it is in directly comparing the choices that the Allan Labor government has decided to make – where to provide funding and where to cut it – that we can see what matters to the government. How else could we interpret the fact that the state Labor government has decided to secretly delay meeting its funding commitments under Gonski, essentially cutting funding from public schools by \$2.4 billion, while at the same time it has somehow found \$350 million for luxury upgrades to corporate boxes at the grand prix and \$1.6 billion for prisons. Cutting funding from public schools to fund prisons and the grand prix is reminiscent of a Liberal Kennett policy from

the 1990s. I almost did not believe it when I first saw it – to think that a Labor government would make that decision – but they did.

In another example of priorities gone askew, the government passed legislation last year to give people who buy apartments \$61 million worth of stamp duty exemptions when buying off the plan. This was a plan that was touted as being about housing affordability, making houses more affordable, which is something the Greens very much support. But the thing is that research has since shown that the vast majority of these stamp duty concessions go to the very, very wealthy – people who do not need it, people who already have multiple apartments. One real estate agent proudly proclaimed in the *Age* last week how his client received a \$1.1 million stamp duty sweetener from the government to buy a \$20 million penthouse in Armadale. They would have bought that home regardless. They did not need \$1.1 million in a handout from Victorian taxpayers to help them buy their \$20 million penthouse in Armadale. The Greens tried to move an amendment to this scheme to cap the value of homes that could be eligible for this stamp duty rebate – to say that no, if you are buying a family home, if you are a first home buyer, then you can get a little bit of help from the government, but not if you are buying a \$20 million apartment. But of course Labor and the Liberals rejected that, and now what this budget does is it actually extends this incentive to buy multimillion-dollar properties by another 12 months.

If handing out million-dollar sweeteners on \$20 million penthouses seems bad enough, consider that at the other end of town the budget reported that the average wait time for priority women seeking housing transfers due to family violence is now 17.4 months. The target is 10 months – they say it is okay for family violence victims to wait 10 months. I do not think that is okay, but that is what the budget said the target is. But it has actually blown out to nearly 18 months. Yet at the same time, the budget cut almost \$5 million from programs for the primary prevention of family violence. A woman fleeing family violence should not be waiting almost a year and a half for a home. The thought of a woman being forced to choose between living on the streets and violence for a year and a half I think would make most people feel physically ill. To know that there are no basic homes for women fleeing family violence available, yet the government is cutting prevention programs and it seems we can afford to give million-dollar sweeteners to people buying \$20 million penthouses – I think that most Victorians would think that those are not the right priorities.

Then we look at the so-called law and order spending in this budget – billions and billions of dollars for police and for prisons. This government continues to decide to invest at the wrong end of the justice system, which is why we are no safer than were 10 years ago. Here in Victoria I do not think we would try to replicate the failed US healthcare system, yet the state government continues to double down on trying to replicate the US-style justice system from the 1980s and 90s, a system that sent several US states bankrupt while entrenching some of the highest crime rates across generations anywhere in the Western world. Nations with the lowest crime rates, the safest countries, spend multiple times more on crime prevention programs – things like the education funding that this government has just cut, things like the family violence funding that this government has just cut and things like programs to keep young people out of the justice system, which were cut last year. Instead we are spending more than \$700 million of new money in this budget on new prison beds that will just entrench offending cycles. Victoria Police this year is getting more than \$4.5 billion. That is almost double what Victoria Police got when Labor came to power a decade ago.

When we talk about the wrong kind of spending, do not even get me started on the private toll roads that are adding to our debt, like the North East Link and the West Gate toll road – all really proposals from private companies like Transurban that make them rich and their shareholders rich but make Victorians poorer and put us into debt. These are all choices. It was a choice when this Premier took journalists on a tour around a prison in budget week; that was the choice that she made, the thing that she thought was the biggest priority to do during the budget week, boasting about how many more people will be held on remand this year. When faced with a bad-faith *Herald Sun* and Liberal Party campaign, Labor responded by funding police and funding prisons instead of the things that we know

get to the root cause of crime: early intervention programs, keeping kids out of trouble; mental and physical health services; and good, stable public housing. It is a choice not to fund our First Nations organisations, who are doing the hard work of community support, and instead put billions into prisons.

In Victoria this budget says it is focused on what matters, but what it says is that there is limitless money for prisons, police, the grand prix and million-dollar tax handouts that benefit millionaires buying penthouses. But unfortunately Labor cannot seem to find money to fully fund our public schools, to protect nature, which we actually need to breathe and to drink water, for family violence and for mental health. The Labor budget says these things do not matter as much as toll roads and prisons; the Greens say that they do. Keeping women safe, addressing the housing and rental affordability crisis, addressing climate change, protecting the environment and investing in public schools and the future prospects of Victoria and our children – that is what matters to the Greens. I listened to the Liberals' budget reply speech, which predictably focused on debt and crime, whipping up fear. That is what they do; that is their playbook. But while they decry Labor's debt, they say very little about what they would actually change or, importantly, what they would cut. Debt is not always bad if it is used to fund productive assets that make people's lives better, but overspending on prisons, police, private toll roads is not what Victorians need. It is not good economic policy, and it is certainly not good social policy.

The thing is, there are actually real solutions on the table right now for how we could do things differently. There are ways to raise money to fund the things we need for a good life, rather than bowing to reactionary, short-term politics. Those ideas exist. For example, an idea that the South Australian government tried to implement when they had a Labor government was a tiny extra levy on the mega profits of Australia's top banks. We could generate \$16.5 billion in revenue over the next decade. Remember that the Commonwealth Bank announced an after-tax half-yearly profit of over \$5 billion earlier this year – just in six months. They are not crying poor. We could raise \$16.5 billion to put into climate action, public housing, free and properly funded schools and so much more, just with a small rounding off of the big banks' super profits. We are happy to give this idea to the government. You can have it. We love it when Labor steals good Greens policy ideas. It is never too late to do the right thing, to tax the big banks and corporations, to look at the actual evidence to improve community safety, not just look at what the *Herald Sun* says, and to focus on the things that really matter: public housing, universal health care, truly free education and long-overdue action on the climate and ecological crises that we are facing. That would be the kind of budget we could really get behind, and it would be the kind of budget that Victorians need to improve their lives.

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (15:56): What a pleasure it is to stand to contribute on the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 and Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025. On this side of the house we are really proud of delivering a budget that is focused on what matters most for families, for children, for seniors and for households across the community, and we know that many households are doing it tough when it comes to the cost of living. That is why this budget is focused on delivering – delivering for families and delivering for young people – because we know that Victorians are working hard to deliver a better future for themselves and their families and their local communities. With this budget we are doing what matters most when it comes to delivering services and supporting families. They know that this is a government that they can rely on when things do get challenging.

We know that the Allan Labor government is supporting my local community in the electorate of St Albans with over \$2.3 billion in cost-of-living relief, and I know one aspect, peeling it down, is providing \$100 in the new power saving bonus for pensioners and concession card holders, which is really important for my electorate, a vulnerable community that relies on these sorts of concessions. And there is the free public transport for under-18s every day, and I know that is something that the student council of Catholic Regional College in St Albans has been advocating for and writing in about

for a number of years now. The student council leaders have been advocating to get this on the agenda, and how important it is for the kids under 18 to get free public transport. This is something that I am really proud that this budget has been able to deliver. Even more, the budget will provide for grandparents and seniors to be able to travel free over the weekend across Victoria. That is also very important.

Locally, again, I am extremely excited when it comes to the \$12.1 million for a new bus route connecting more residents in Cairnlea. Cairnlea has been working with me in partnership over the last two years, and I do want to thank the residents and locals who have worked with me to deliver this, together with the hardworking member for Kororoit. I know that this bus route will not only serve Cairnlea but also serve Deer Park residents. I know that this is a real opportunity to provide that extra service into Cairnlea, which will assist Victoria University Secondary College, the local primary school in Cairnlea and of course local kinders. This is really important.

I know that in addition to that we are delivering a budget that funds bulk billing and in particular the Sunshine urgent care centre and of course the women's health clinic at Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital. This complements Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital and of course Sunshine Hospital by providing one of the best health services in the west. There is no doubt when it comes to delivering the best quality health care, whether it is for a child or looking at the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital, it certainly continues to grow and expand in its service and care. I do also want to thank Western Health, all the staff and the team there, who do a super job each and every day caring for my constituents.

We are also backing education through investment in more free TAFE, and I know the work that Victoria University does in St Albans campus and of course Sunshine campus, providing those opportunities with free TAFE so that people can transition into secure jobs, which is absolutely important. This complements the jobs and skills centre at Sunshine, and I know that the additional support and expanding free TAFE into our local schools is absolutely something that the community is looking forward to.

Furthermore, what I am absolutely excited about is St Albans North Primary School, a school that has a long history. I know that many locals have certainly passed through the gates or know the school well. Just recently I had the opportunity to meet the new principal Cameron Black, and I want to thank the principal, who hosted me. It was supposed to be a meet and greet for the new principal, but it ended up being more than that, and I had the absolute honour of sharing the good news that St Albans North Primary School will be part of the \$10 million planning funding. This is something that the school community has been looking forward to and again working with me on in partnership for the last 12 months. I could not have been happier to deliver that news to the new principal and of course the teachers and the school community just last week. This is fantastic news for that local community – an opportunity to build important infrastructure regardless of the postcode, regardless of which suburb you live in. It is so important. This complements our delivery when it comes to delivering new school rebuilds, with Monmia Primary School at Keilor Downs and of course St Albans Heights Primary School, which is just about to complete \$15 million worth of works. It has been really important to be able to work with our local school community to develop these local projects.

On top of that, of course many locals have raised, whether it is by writing to me or seeing me at the local shopping centre, the issue of Taylors Road in Keilor Downs. I know my locals have been expressing the fact that they want to feel safe, and there have been three particular intersections that continue to need to be improved. I am really happy that this year's budget will upgrade and improve safety along the three intersections on Taylors Road from Carbine Way, all along in front of the Brimbank Aquatic and Wellness Centre and of course in front of my office at Keilor Central shopping centre. These are important works, and again I want to thank the local community for working with me to deliver these important works for my local community.

I do also want to again add my absolute support when it comes to local community groups delivering food relief for locals. We are seeing that additional funding of \$18 million, and I know my local Loaves and Fishes food bank in St Albans does incredible work each and every day – volunteers feeding families across the electorate and even beyond the west. I am really delighted to see that additional funding that can help our not-for-profit groups deliver their important work.

When it comes to delivering for families, we are helping families during cost-of-living challenges and, more importantly, doing what matters most for hardworking Victorian families. On this side of the house we know that good health care, better transport, quality education and helping families in times of need are things this government is delivering.

I know the member for Laverton was here a moment ago, but I do want to thank the member for Laverton. When it comes to this budget, we are seeing the building of the new superhub station. The Sunshine station superhub is a game changer when it comes to fast-tracking airport rail. We know in particular in my electorate there are many, many workers that travel to the airport and back, and I am very happy to see this project come to fruition. We will also see the rebuild of the Albion station, and I know my locals in Ardeer and Albion – you know, it has been a number of years, probably many – have been looking forward to seeing that rebuild at Albion station. I want to thank the member for Laverton for her strong advocacy and leadership on this project, because this is a game changer.

This complements the Metro Tunnel, which we will see towards the end of the year, again, connecting my electorate in particular when it comes to getting into town and of course accessing the four brand new stations along the Metro Tunnel. And we have other infrastructure that will help and assist the west, and that includes the West Gate Tunnel. So we can see that we are connecting more and more of the west with game-changing projects like the Sunshine superhub, airport rail and new stations, and I am proud to say my electorate is now level crossing free thanks to our government. I am absolutely happy to see that it is also safer, with accessibility from one side to the other. It is thanks to our government.

I can talk about our commitment and investment when it comes to veterans in this year's budget. We will see the Shrine of Remembrance get an additional \$2.4 million over two years to continue to deliver their valuable service to our community. On top of that will be ongoing funding of \$4.2 million that is provided every year. Our government has supported the shrine since 2014 with record amounts of funding. Each year we have seen an increase when it comes to our funding for the shrine. I do want to thank the shrine for the work that they do, and the leadership of the Shrine of Remembrance. We support their vital role every day and in particular on Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and with the hundreds of services that are conducted each year.

We have also allocated an additional \$800,000 over two years to extend the public sector veterans employment strategy. I do want to thank Major General David McLachlan for his leadership in this space. He has done mammoth work together with younger veterans so that they can transition into public sector jobs – good, secure jobs – and already we have supported over 500 younger veterans into public sector jobs. This is important work. I know that our veterans give so much, and this is one thing, one small thing, that we can give back to our veterans, who have served our country and our state. It is only right that we give them something back in securing their transition into jobs and into our community.

We have invested in small business, and we have invested in employment. And most importantly, when it comes to youth as well, in the youth portfolio we have seen the investment for our community support groups from the south-east to the west, delivering on important work and the work that they do to continue to support young people in our community. Just today I met with the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, under the incredible leadership of Mary and the team. Thank you very much for all the work that you do. The Centre for Multicultural Youth, with Carmel and many –

**A member** interjected.

**Natalie SULEYMAN:** Yes, Carmel. Many know Carmel and the great work that she does for our young people, in particular our multicultural young people, across this state, not only in the south-east and west but also in regional Victoria. We will continue to invest in and support programs that are important for young people, that get young people on track and support young people in their journey so that they can continue to study or transition into employment, which is really important for our community.

This is a budget, as I said from the outset, that really does deliver. It delivers for families, it delivers for small business, it delivers for the future and, most importantly, it delivers on what matters most to our families in Victoria. We will continue to invest to support families, seniors and all Victorians during these challenging times. As I said, this is a budget that delivers for the electorate of St Albans and Victoria.

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (16:11): I thank the Government Whip for coordinating the time so we can get a couple of speakers up on the budget this afternoon.

*Members interjecting.*

**David HODGETT:** Yes, a good whip – cooperation. I want to use my time really to focus on local issues in my electorate of Croydon. There will be plenty on both sides who talk about aspects of the budget and tax and different things that are happening statewide, but I would really like to focus on my local electorate because I want to point out some local projects and issues that I have been advocating for and working hard for and fighting for for many, many years indeed which were overlooked or ignored. I want to continue to highlight those to the government in seeking future funding for those.

But I have got a couple of positive things today. There are a couple of positive things in the budget that I would like to touch on, where there have been some small amounts of money put towards some projects that I have been fighting for for many, many years. In allocating some small amounts of money to those projects, it raises a number of questions about when these projects will commence, when they can be completed, how much money has been allocated and when more money will be coming. I will put those on record so that my community might get a better understanding of when some of these projects will be delivered.

Labor are good at this; they are very good at this. They go to an election with an election promise, and then they do not fund it for a period of years. Then towards the back end of the cycle they will drop out a little bit of money, a little bit of a trickle to get people excited that the project is coming along and will be delivered. But then if it is going to be delivered into 2027 or beyond, that is really an invitation to various people that have an interest in those projects to vote for Labor again so it gets delivered, or is it that they have failed to deliver it as promised? That is in the eye of the voter, I guess. But I will point out a couple of those projects.

The first I want to speak about is the new Maroondah Hospital, or the Queen Elizabeth II hospital, as the former Premier Andrews promised back at the 2022 election. Just to go back a step further, the Labor government promised in 2018 a brand new emergency department at Maroondah Hospital, and all we saw were two portables and a tent. That is what we got there for a period of time. Then in 2022 the then Premier Daniel Andrews came out and announced \$1.2 billion, I think it was, to redevelop the Maroondah Hospital, to rebuild it from the ground up. I used my members statement today to talk about that because that was a promise that was made in 2022 and here we are in 2025 and we have not seen any money committed to it or any planning committed to it – no shovels in the ground. We are no closer to actually getting that brand new hospital built. I will go back to Dan Andrews's tweet at the time. He said:

A re-elected Labor government will redevelop and expand Maroondah Hospital from the ground up.

That was a \$1.2 billion commitment, and it was a captain's call, as I understand it. He said at the time that it is going to be renamed the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in honour of Her Majesty Queen

Elizabeth II, but of course all that did was upset some local community groups that went on to explain the Indigenous background to Maroondah. I am all for consideration of a name change, but I think there is a process we need to go through for that. If the Premier or the government of today wants to change the name of Maroondah Hospital to Queen Elizabeth II, I think they should need to go through a consultation and community process to achieve that outcome and get a bit of feedback. As I understand it, 'maroondah' is an Aboriginal word that means 'throwing' and 'maroon' means 'leaves'. A local group did start a petition at the time explaining the name Maroondah. 'Maroondah' is a word from the language of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people which means 'throwing leaves', and using the word for a suburb of Melbourne is a simple and positive way to acknowledge the languages and culture that have been practised in the area for over 60,000 years. So again that raised a bit of annoyance to some local community groups that were not consulted on the name change.

But back to the budget: we see in the budget papers that there is a Hospital Infrastructure Delivery Fund statewide. There are three hospitals listed there, or in fact four if you count some redevelopment to two of them. One of the lines in that Hospital Infrastructure Delivery Fund statewide is 'a new Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Melbourne's east', and I will come back to that. What was most concerning and what I would like the government to clarify is that it says in the same budget paper:

The TEI has reduced by \$12.990 million due to a revised project scope.

Again, community members are saying, 'What does that mean? Why has money been pulled out of that project scope? Is that for the other hospitals mentioned in there? Are they are going to be reduced? Is that for the Maroondah Hospital or the Queen Elizabeth II hospital?' The government has cleverly said 'Melbourne's east' because there has been a rumour for some time that this hospital is going to be closed and relocated to Wantirna. If that is going to happen, then the public deserve to know that.

I know Maroondah City Council – the mayor and the great CEO there Steve Kozlowski – has done a power of work, an important piece of work, to put in a plan that would see the Maroondah Hospital rebuilt in Maroondah on a parcel of land near the Eastland Shopping Centre, which seemed to be an ideal solution to this because the existing hospital could continue to function and operate rather than being knocked down and rebuilt, which will obviously have a huge impact on the health services. But a new hospital could be built while the other one functioned. Then that could be closed, and the new one, which would still be in Maroondah, could be built. The second advantage with that plan, as Maroondah City Council points out, is that it is closer to public transport. At the moment, where the Maroondah Hospital is located, I think some buses service it and obviously taxis and Ubers service it, but it is quite some distance from the railway station, whereas a new Maroondah Hospital built on that parcel of land near Eastland would be much closer to Ringwood station, so that would be an advantage there.

So they are the questions that remain. How much money in that budget paper is being allocated to the new Maroondah Hospital, or Queen Elizabeth II hospital, as the government lists it? When they say 'Melbourne's east', is it still going to be built in Maroondah? And what is the timeframe? Because this was promised in 2022 as an election commitment, and here we are in 2025, some 15 months or so till the election, and nothing has been done. I think you do not have to be too smart to realise that it is very unlikely that this hospital is going to be commenced before the next election, let alone future budgets. We watch that with interest and we put that on record, asking either the minister or the Premier to clarify: how much money? Where is it going to be built? Is it going to be closed and relocated to Wantirna, as the rumours suggest? And what is the timeframe for this project?

I will move now to another one where again there is a little bit of positive news – Melba College. I have the Shadow Minister for Education at the table here, who is well aware of this project. Melba College has been promised its stage 3 works for quite some time. In fact, again, Labor has form on this. They do a full redevelopment for a school, which I am pleased with – I get a school in my electorate that is going to be rebuilt. There are plenty of new suburbs and new areas that get brand new schools built. It is not often that you have a lot of redeveloped schools in existing areas, so it is pleasing

to see that. But when you commence a project, it has got to be finished. I remember we fought for Yarra Hills for years and years and years when I was first elected in 2006, because they committed money to stage 1, then it was a long time before stage 2 came, then it was a long time again. It was 10 years – a decade – before stage 3 was completed. I remember there were some students that went to that school in, what was that, year 7, and they had finished their schooling before the new facilities were available, so they never saw the benefit of those brand new, state-of-the-art facilities.

The same is happening at Melba, exactly the same, where stage 1 is promised, stage 2 is promised, the whole project is promised but of course it is trickled out. They do the new buildings for stage 1, we fight hard for stage 2, the school community waits and waits and waits and stage 2 eventually comes and now we are waiting for stage 3 to finish off. So you have not got a project that is finished, and it has gone on for years, much to the frustration of the school community and much to the frustration of the principal and leadership team there. In fact there was an embarrassing situation where the money was in the budget a couple of years ago and they jumped for joy, only to be told by the then education minister, ‘Oh, that was a mistake,’ and it was pulled out of the budget. So again, they have had to wait and wait and wait.

Now we are wondering how much of the \$12.7 million originally promised for stage 3 is actually going to be delivered, because it looks like only approximately \$3.3 million has been funded for the stage 3 Melba College works, and it looks like those final-stage works will not be commenced until next year and will not be completed until after 2027. So again we have this situation where it will be a new Parliament, well past 2027, whatever flavour of government that will be – whatever colour government, red or blue, that will be; hopefully blue for our sake. But those works will have to be fought for again well into 2027 and beyond the government of the day. So how much of the \$12.7 million is going to be delivered, when will the works actually start when they say 2026, and when will they be completed? The Melba College community, students, school team, leadership team and school council deserve to know those answers so they can finally get stage 3 finished with a whole brand new site and not have to worry about it for another 50 or so years.

The third positive, if I can say, that was in the budget paper is funding that was allocated – the 2025–26 budget provides some money for 19 projects in partnership with the Commonwealth government to upgrade local roads across suburbs. One of those happens to be the Maroondah Highway–Yarra Road intersection and Kent Avenue upgrade works, but it is only for planning. So again, we have fought for this money for many, many years –

**A member** interjected.

**David HODGETT:** Yes, it is good. If we can get the project done, I will be happiest. But we were promised \$4.6 million back in 2018; we fought for it again in 2022. That \$4.6 million that was promised to ease congestion so we can get to work and school easier and have better pedestrian safety was funded. I hazard to say that that project is probably two or three times that now, and this is only the planning work. So again, great, it is a positive. But we would like to know when we could expect that these works would be actually undertaken so that the important work on pedestrian safety and the congestion at Maroondah Highway, Kent Avenue and Yarra Road will be completed. Once again, if you do the planning, there is an expectation that the project will be delivered. We do not want to see planning happen and then the project be put on the never-never for years and years.

I will turn my attention now quickly in the couple of minutes I have left to just a couple of things I will continue to fight for that were ignored or overlooked in the budget, and the main one there that we have been fighting for for many years is the funding for the redevelopment of the Mooroolbark Heights clubrooms. Mooroolbark Heights is home to the Mooroolbark Football Club and Mooroolbark Cricket Club. I have been working with the federal member Aaron Violi, the member for Casey, for many years to look at the redevelopment of the clubrooms there. It is a great success story in terms of the way the club has grown, with women’s teams, veterans teams, their men’s teams and their juniors, but the facilities were built back in about 1950 and are very much outdated, so in desperate need of an



update. I will continue to be a strong champion for the funding to deliver that necessary redevelopment and upgrade. It is disappointing that it has not been funded and disappointing that it has not got the attention of the government, because it is a terrific project that would service the area for many, many years to come.

The duplication of the rail line between Mooroolbark and Lilydale is going to need some attention at some time, and again it gets no attention in the state budget. That is a project the member for Evelyn and I are very much interested in in terms of people using the Lilydale line all the way up there.

The other ones that I always have a keen interest in are the local charities that I support in the local area – ones that do some terrific work and for very little money. The Babes Project looks after perinatal and pregnancy services for women. Hope City Mission, the Dining Room Mission, Elishacare, SALT Sport and Life Training and the Eastern Karen Community Association all do fantastic work in our local community and deserve to be supported. Some of those groups could do a lot of work with small grants of \$25,000, \$50,000, \$100,000. I know if SALT were given a million dollars, they could do some tremendous work across all of Victoria. I am sure some people in the house are familiar with the terrific work that Sport and Life Education do, run by Dave Burt and his team. They have some fantastic outcomes, and if they got a bit of funding, they could really make a difference. What is really annoying is when we see some of the waste, the mismanagement and the money that the government spends elsewhere that could actually go a long way to funding all of these projects and would last well into the future. I will continue to fight for those worthy projects and get them in front of ministers and the government to try and get them the attention they need and the funding in future budgets.

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (16:26): I am very pleased to take only a couple of minutes to highlight some really important funding and budget announcements as part of my contribution on the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 and Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025. I am very pleased to say that Cranbourne is actually the education district inside the Education State, and I am very pleased to be able to update the house that Rangebank Primary School, under the extraordinary leadership of Adriana Allan, is going to have an amazing refurbishment. This is a school that is very well loved. What goes on inside the school is something that should be celebrated at every opportunity, but they certainly did need a refurbishment. I was very pleased to be able to have that opportunity to call Adriana. I was also pleased that Casey Fields Primary School is being expanded. Cameron Heath, again, has been a terrific leader, and the school have been so successful that their extraordinary numbers mean that they are ready for an expansion, and I am looking forward to watching those plans as they go forward. And of course Cranbourne West Secondary College will also be expanded under Rob Duncan. They are really important examples of the education district inside the Education State.

I was also pleased to call Casey Thunder, an inclusive football club with a great women's team that have been amazingly successful. They will now have some seating that will make sure that the families that enjoy watching the team can enjoy it in comfort, and it will also benefit the cricket club.

As I wait for the sparkling member for Kew to return, I will also let people know that free public transport is going to be very much welcomed by the people of Cranbourne. An amazing cost-of-living opportunity, free public transport for children and for seniors is very important.

I will take now the opportunity to commend this budget, which is delivering for Cranbourne, delivering for the state and delivering cost-of-living measures that recognise that people need to be able to do what they need to look after their families, and that also includes a power saving bonus. With those few words, and with the great joy that this appropriation bill – a sensible and balanced bill – will bring to the community of Cranbourne, I look forward to the passage of this bill, and I commend it to the house.

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (16:29): I rise today to talk about this disastrous set of budget figures that were brought to the Parliament last week. I am indeed puffing, because I am a 53-year-old man who is relatively not fit and I have just spent the last 10 minutes on ABC radio because, unlike

this government, ABC radio have actually listened to country Victoria and are broadcasting live from the good seat of Polwarth today. And why are they there, with hundreds of people, at the Farmers Arms Hotel in Beeac? They are there listening to the heartache and the hardship that is rampant in country Victoria today, and this budget has thrown fuel on a desperate fire in regional Victoria – a terrible load of toxic fuel on farming communities and farms and regional organisations right across country Victoria. This budget does nothing except rip more money from desperate communities, from one end of Victoria to the other. It rips that money out not to help them at times of drought, not to help them at times of national emergency or times of despair – which many, many people in country Victoria are facing at the moment. It is truly desperate.

A constituent of mine wrote on one of our many local Facebook pages this week that the cost and the availability of water are so desperate that a family with three kids can no longer even have a shower at home. They are having to go into the local caravan park each day with the kids before school to have a wash and a clean-up because they simply do not have the water at home. That family is asking what is in this budget for a family like that, because what is in this budget for that family is a big, fat new tax on their farm. In a few weeks time, when the rates notices are struck – the de facto State Revenue Office, which our 79 local councils are being turned into – they are looking down the barrel at more money being taken from their farm, taken from their pockets to come here to Melbourne to pay for the vanity projects of this government, a reckless government that is not honest with Victorians about how much its projects are costing. We have heard about the Treasurer's slush fund; that is what it has turned into. More money now is buried in the books than in any other state in Australia. This government is hiding money there so it can write out sly cheques to pay for projects that are over time, over budget and simply not delivering a benefit to all Victorians.

This budget this year has delivered a promise to reverse a broken promise in last year's budget for one school. One school in my electorate is receiving some money, which this government went to the last election promising that it would have already. Not only that, but it is the most disadvantaged school I have in my electorate, Colac West Primary School. It is a great school with great principals and great leaders, but it has got a really tough cohort of kids that it has got to help look after in a very old and antiquated building. The minister in the other place and a candidate who thought that Labor could better represent the electorate of Polwarth stood before the front page of the *Colac Herald* and promised that community a school. The last budget cancelled it, and in this budget they have said, 'After the next election we promise we'll deliver you that.' Why would that school community believe this budget? There is only a little bit of hope in the budget. Why would that community believe it?

They only have to look at another part of the electorate of Polwarth. This government went to two elections, 2018 and 2022, and promised a hospital in Torquay. They have got a lovely big sign; in fact the government are so broke they cannot even afford to take down a sign that is now living history. It is a living lie to the community: 'This is the site of the new Torquay hospital.' That was cancelled in last budget. This budget delivers nothing for health care in Torquay. If you read the rhetoric online about the need for the Surf Coast community to have its brand new hospital to deal with the 20,000-odd people that live in that community – this government has now cancelled it. They have not just said they will push it into the never-never, they have cancelled it. It is not happening. The land is sitting there, and that community is going to have to continue to do the 20-, 30-, 40-, 50-minute drive into Geelong to receive basic health care. It is not in this budget.

In this budget the fire services levy comes on top of many other taxes that have also managed to go up. The fire services levy is particularly mean because it is just a property tax by another name. It has used the goodwill and the good name of our SES volunteers and our CFA volunteers to create yet another property tax here in Victoria. That property tax from the Polwarth electorate alone is over \$20 million. In a few months time this government is going to steal \$20 million extra out of my three local government areas. At a time of drought that \$20 million will mean the Colac Otway shire, the Corangamite shire in particular and even the Surf Coast shire are not going to be able to step up and help support their farming communities with perhaps some rate cuts, rate subsidies or rate deferrals.

Any fat that might have existed in local council rates has been taken by this government to pay for overblown projects and vanity projects here in Melbourne that will never be of any use or value to the people of Polwarth.

At the same time we heard the Minister for Roads and Road Safety trying to justify why in this budget there is a reduction of some 96 per cent – can you imagine that? – in the amount of road surfacing they are going to do. On one hand, we had the minister out and the Premier – I think she may have been involved at some stage – talking about record funding for roads. Read the *Weekly Times*, read the *Stock & Land*, read the RACV and other auto journals – you name it. They have clearly identified south-west Victoria as having the roads in the worst condition. For quite some time, probably the last five years, this government has regularly told the community that the roads are in such poor condition because of the floods. Hello, minister for roads. Hello, government. We are in a three-year drought at the moment in south-west Victoria. We have record low rainfall. You have to go back to 1900 – you have to go back to before cars were even on roads – to find a time that was as dry as we are experiencing now.

Our communities hear this government say, 'It's because of the floods. It's because there's too much water around.' Is there more that this government could do to sound disconnected from the people of regional and rural Victoria? They have thrown new taxes at them, not just a little increase. The community often cops a 5 per cent increase, maybe on a bad day a 10 per cent increase, but no, we are going the full hog: a 150-odd per cent increase for farmers, 100 per cent for households, 100 per cent for shopkeepers. These are massive increases. At a time of cost of living and of drought, this government's response is more taxes. They are not going to repair the roads. Let us face it: you would actually get more bang for buck repairing roads in a drought because you would have less delays, and curing and sealing of roads would probably be more successful. But no, we are seeing a 90-odd per cent cut in the amount of effort this government is going to put into patching and repairing roads. That is a huge disappointment.

I will tell you something else that has really disappointed the community, and I am sure it will be a topic of conversation at the Farmers Arms Hotel with 774 this afternoon. Every single business, every single household and every single farmer in my electorate is going to be paying a lot, lot more, but there is a cohort of people that are actually getting a really good deal. They are getting about a 95 per cent reduction in their fire services tax. If you are a big-box retailer down here in Melbourne, a big blue-and-yellow furniture sales shop that might just happen to be Swedish and have allen keys – I do not know whether there is a connection with the allen key there or not – and you are owned by one of the richest families in the world, this government has said, 'Do you know what, we're going to give you a 95 per cent reduction.' Can I tell you how galling that is to farm communities?

In winter last year we saw a wind turbine catch fire, and it could not be put out. We learned that when a wind turbine malfunctions and catches fire we cannot put it out; we have to let it burn. To the north of my wonderful electorate of Polwarth we have the world's biggest wind farm being built at the moment, owned by the big blue box foreign furniture retailer that is owned by one of the wealthiest families in the world. That is sitting there to the north of my electorate, along with many, many others owned by companies from Spain and China and all around the world. They are potential fire hazards. They certainly have the odd little spark fire during construction, and we often see our local CFA volunteer crews going out to keep the community safe and put out the little spot fires. But that is okay. They are industrial enterprises.

How do you think those communities feel when they are trucking in water, trucking in feed, losing money hand over fist and this government says, 'Hang on a minute. Big multinational companies, we're going to give you a 96 per cent reduction in your fire service levy. On the Golden Plains wind farm, for every billion dollars we're going to save you about a million dollars a year'? That is extraordinary. This government's whole argument is 'We have to have this big new tax to keep people safe from climate change, we've got to keep people safe from increasing emergencies and we've got to have more money to spend in Melbourne on vanity projects. We need to do that.' Yet they are

saying, 'Hang on, biggest, richest multinational energy companies, we're going to give you a heap of money back.' That is certainly not going onto people's bottom lines in lower energy prices or lower costs – no, siree, it is certainly not. In fact – all the evidence came out this week – we are seeing massive increases to energy prices. This government has given away money to multinational companies in regional Victoria for no clear benefit for those communities. I can tell you now that is yet another nail in the coffin of this operation here in Victoria at the moment. It is grossly unfair. It cannot be justified. It is another reason why this budget this year is yet another example of how this Labor government has completely lost touch with the community and is refusing to listen.

Before the budget was handed down, in the last opportunity in the sitting week before, I raised again on behalf of the Polwarth community the need for urgent funding down in Apollo Bay for the surf lifesaving club. The Apollo Bay Surf Life Saving Club has a huge amount of rescues every year. It is one of the major surf lifesaving clubs that keeps our tourists, our visitors and our locals safe every year on the Great Ocean Road. This government has had an opportunity now for about five budgets in a row to support that organisation to make sure it has the facilities it needs to keep people safe on the beach but also to reward the effort of those emergency service volunteers – mind you, they will not be getting anything out of the big new taxes that they are all paying down in Apollo Bay. Here is an opportunity this government could have had to do a wonderful deal with the local P-12 school in Apollo Bay and the surf lifesaving club on a joint venture to fix up that facility and provide a real hub of excellence for young people to learn about blue-water ocean safety, and this government has not taken that up.

They also did not take up the opportunity to look after the Birregurra Recreation Reserve, which has been lobbying long and hard for an upgrade of facilities. In fact in the main areas of the rec centre hall there are literally holes in the floor. It is in very poor condition. It is antiquated. It is a good 60-plus years old in terms of its shower and change rooms. It is a really important hub. There is the cricket club, the netball club, the tennis club, the car club in the local community and the footy club. These are important bits of local infrastructure that this government has not seen fit to back and support.

To finish up, we then get to the fact that – if I can just take a minute on the fisheries – this budget has locked away enormous cuts to fisheries. In an electorate like mine, where the whole southern boundary is of course the wonderful Great Ocean Road and the ocean is out there, we should have a thriving and sustainable fishing community. We have had fisheries officers for a long, long time making sure that people do the right things in those communities. This budget sees the end of that sustainable, well-managed fishery along the Great Ocean Road. It sees the end because the fisheries officers and the inspectors that the community relies on to make sure people do the right thing will be eliminated.

This government talks a lot about how the Liberals will cut things. It is not the Liberals that cut services and cut good governance and good management of the state; it is the Labor Party. The Labor Party has cut that, because again, you do not need fisheries officers in the seats in suburban Melbourne – no, you do not. You need them out in regional Victoria – and yet another cut. Regional Victorians in this budget will be paying more and getting a lot less – less on their roads, less in their services, less protection of our fisheries and nothing to help with the drought situation that is crippling Victoria. It is a high-taxing, low-output budget.

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (16:44): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

**State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (16:45): I was not sure that we were going to get a guernsey on this one, but thank you to both sides for allowing me to make a contribution on behalf of the Greens on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. I am speaking on behalf of the Victorian Greens to make our contribution on this bill. This bill proposes a number of changes to a range of state taxation and levy acts. They are mostly quite modest changes in the scheme of things.

There are two parts in particular that the Greens are very supportive of, which I want to speak about first. The bill proposes to make some land tax and duties concessions for those experiencing family violence, which the Greens support, and to ensure that men – and yes, it is mostly men – have fewer financial tools to control, coerce and abuse their partners with and that women are not adversely impacted financially by leaving an abusive or violent relationship. Unfortunately, as I think we all know, almost 30 women this year have been killed by their intimate partners, a figure that is still completely and totally unacceptable, and this is despite us having a Royal Commission into Family Violence. Women are still being killed at an alarming rate, and we still have waiting lists of over 18 months for priority family violence housing programs in Victoria. Asking women at risk of family violence to stay in a violent house for a year and a half is really unacceptable, and we need to reduce the priority housing transfer waiting times by directing additional revenue to family violence priority housing programs. But this change, even though it is a small change, is a welcome one. It is one that means that if you have to flee your house due to family violence you are not then charged land tax on that house that you cannot live in because you fled it because of family violence. I think that it is not going to apply in all cases. It is not going to affect a huge number of people. A huge number of people are affected by family violence. It is just one segment of that affected population that will benefit from this, but it is still really important that we are removing any barrier to leaving a violent home or a violent relationship or a violent situation, so the Greens support that.

The bill also makes some important changes to the Trust for Nature program, and we welcome these because they happened after advocacy from me and the Greens. Trust for Nature works with private landholders to permanently protect habitat on private land for conservation purposes. So it puts conservation covenants on private land, and it is a really great program in terms of preservation of habitat, because as we know, the vast majority of land in Victoria is privately owned and that private land has a huge role to play in terms of meeting our conservation objectives and protecting biodiversity and threatened species. Conservation covenants are hugely popular because many landowners would love to see the habitat and wildlife on their land protected for future generations. Covenants allow these landowners to enter into agreements which protect the habitat and the species on their land for generations to come, and many people leave that as their legacy.

In 2024, after negotiations with the government over the vacant land tax, the Greens actually secured exemptions to the vacant land tax for land being protected under conservation covenants. As part of this the government also announced \$2 million as a special fund for Trust for Nature to help them facilitate more nature covenants on private land, particularly vacant land that would have been subject to this tax. It is now exempt because of our negotiations. But the thing was, this \$2 million and how it could be used was put into legislation, and that initial legislation was too restrictive on what kind of land that \$2 million could be used to then put covenants on. As a result Trust for Nature came to us and said they have not actually really been able to use that \$2 million. They have not been able to use that funding that the government already allocated to them due to the really restrictive nature of the legislation, as it was very restrictive as to which kinds of land it could be applied to. So we raised this issue with the government, and I am pleased that we have worked cooperatively with both the minister and also especially the Treasurer to come up with some amendments to put forward to resolve that

issue, which will mean that Trust for Nature will now be able to work with a lot more landholders to apply covenants on their land. They will actually be able to use that \$2 million in the manner in which it was intended and to protect more land for conservation across Victoria, and that is only a good thing. It delivers a small but not insignificant win for our wildlife and biodiversity. Particularly at a time when we are facing the climate crisis and the collapse of biodiversity that comes with it, we know that we need to do absolutely everything we can to protect habitat. That is why actually a lot more people are putting covenants on their land, because they can see what is happening with climate change, they want to do something practical about it and they want to leave a legacy. So those are two parts of this bill that the Greens are really happy to support – very welcome parts of this bill.

Other parts of the bill require a little bit more scrutiny. One of the most significant aspects of this bill is it extends the 12-month stamp duty concession for off-the-plan developments by another 12 months. We were told last year by the housing minister that this was a one-off stimulus. It was brought in part because interest rates had remained stubbornly high and that meant that developers presumably were having trouble pre-selling their off-the-plan apartments, which was then presumably making it less lucrative for them to build big developments and build new developments. The problem is that we now actually have some data which shows that these tax concessions are overwhelmingly going to wealthy people who are buying expensive property. Last week it was revealed in the *Age* that one real estate agent smugly proclaimed recently how their client had received a \$1.1 million stamp duty ‘sweetener’ from the government to buy a \$20 million penthouse apartment in Armadale. Now, I hope in this place that we could all agree, given the current housing affordability crisis that we all agree is happening, that regular Victorian taxpayers really should not be giving \$1.1 million as a handout or a sweetener to someone to buy a \$20 million luxury penthouse apartment in Armadale. It is not where our taxpayer dollars should be going; in fact it is obscene. It really is obscene.

I would have hoped that would have prompted the Labor government to look at this tax concession and see how it might be tightened up so that it can be targeted at those who most need it, those who most deserve it and those who we collectively as Victorians agree should be getting help to get into the housing market. Unfortunately, instead of doing that – instead of fixing it – what the Labor government has brought to us today is a plan to extend the tax scheme as it is for another 12 months. This decision essentially seems to be driven by the property development lobby. They want taxpayer help to sell the apartments they have built. They say they need more special treatment. They really have the government over a barrel in a way, because the government relies on property developers to build the housing that the government says that they will need to meet their targets.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ellen SANDELL:** I am hearing interjections from the other side saying, ‘Who else is going to build it?’ That is true, but the thing is the property development industry then has the Labor government over a barrel in saying, ‘We’re not going to build these apartments unless we get the kind of profits that we want, and in order to do that we need handouts from the taxpayer.’ I do not think that is something the Victorian government thinks is okay. I think it smells kind of bad, particularly when we have developers right now sitting on empty apartments, unsold. We do have cases of developers that have got apartments but are refusing to release them onto the market until they can make the level of profit that they want. It is really bad behaviour, and it is behaviour that adds to the housing affordability crisis. Then these same developers have the gall to go to the government and cry poor, ask for tax handouts and essentially say, ‘We can’t help you meet your housing targets. We’re going to threaten not to build more apartments until we get the profits that we deserve, and we need a handout.’ It is really not on. The Greens are really happy to work with this Labor government on solutions to the housing crisis that work and that are not just about lining the pockets of the property developers.

When this stamp duty concession scheme originally came to the Parliament, the Greens suggested some amendments to cap the scheme so that it would only apply to homes that are genuinely affordable for young people, for single parents, for families, for people in housing stress – people that we all agree need some help to get into the housing market. Those amendments were rejected by the government,

and now what we have before us is an extension of the policy for 12 months with no cap on it. It means that anybody can get these sweeteners or these handouts, even if they are buying a \$20 million luxury apartment in Armadale. We very much support, as I said, measures that assist people to get into home ownership and that help with the housing affordability crisis, but we will be looking at what amendments we might be able to move in the upper house to try and make this scheme fairer, to ensure that it does work for those who need it most and helps with housing affordability, rather than just being a tax handout to the wealthy who already own multiple properties.

This bill also makes some relatively minor changes to the taxation regime around build-to-rent developments. The Victorian government has bet very big on these build-to-rent developments. Quite a few have popped up in my electorate and even in my neighbourhood of Kensington. Melbourne has 6001 completed build-to-rent apartments and another 18,885 – over 18,000 – approved or under construction. But the thing is that, despite the promises and the model that has been sold to the Victorian government, the developments are not actually providing more affordable housing, which is really unfortunate. They are actually largely a premium product charging above-market rents. The reason the developers like them and we are seeing such a proliferation of them is that governments, including this government, have given the developers significant tax concessions to make them more profitable, and they have become easier to build and more profitable than build-to-sell apartment buildings. These developers get land tax concessions of up to 50 per cent of a cut on the taxable land value for up to 30 years in Victoria, so it is a really significant exemption from land tax. They are also exempt from the absentee owner surcharge, which is applicable to foreign-owned overseas companies and developers that build build-to-rent developments.

There is also – and this is quite concerning – a loophole that allows build-to-rent developers to be exempt from paying the public open space levy to local governments. The public open space levy is really important because it is charged on subdivisions, including apartment developments built for sale, and goes directly towards building more public parks and open spaces. As we know, parks and open spaces are sorely needed in the communities that are getting more developments built. There is no reason, really, why build-to-rent developments should be exempt from that open space levy when identical developments offering apartments for sale – including in my electorate; there are some that were built for sale that had to pay the levy – are just down the road from some that are built to rent that did not have to pay the levy. That does not really seem fair, and it is actually short-changing local governments of a significant amount of the money that is needed to build our new parks.

We need more housing where people want to live, but densification without open space, without amenity, is actually a recipe for unlivable suburbs. I do not think any of us want that. Councils are actually having to pay exorbitant amounts to buy land to retrofit parks and open space after developments, with no contribution from the developers, who are the ones who make all the profit. That is not really acceptable. In my electorate it is not hypothetical; we are actually already seeing it. We are seeing a proliferation of developments in somewhere like Kensington without the local government having the money to be able to build the parks and all the amenity that people expect when they live in the city and really deserve. Kids need to be able to go outside. People need to be able to go outside and walk their dogs. You do not want to live in a place that has no outdoor open space. So the Greens will be looking to move amendments in the other place to close this loophole and ensure that build-to-rent developers are treated the same as everyone else regarding the open space levy. We will also look at whether we should do something around the concessions regarding land tax and the absentee owner surcharge.

Budgets are about choices about what is important – what gets supported and what does not – and I think that million-dollar handouts to \$20 million apartments is not what the Victorian government wants to see.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

**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.

**Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025**

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

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motions of Danny Pearson and Mary-Anne Thomas:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Motions agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motions agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

**Business interrupted under resolution of house of 14 May.**

*Adjournment*

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Before I call members for adjournment matters, I want to advise the house that today is the last day for Paul Groenewegen to be our Serjeant-at-Arms. Can we thank Paul for his efforts.

*Members applauded.*

**Footscray electorate community services**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (17:02): (1171) My request is for the Minister for Mental Health in the other place to join me in Footscray to discuss our proposal for a multidisciplinary response to homelessness and acute mental health challenges in central Footscray. Funding for support workers was provided in the recent budget to help deliver the program, which will be established in collaboration with the City of Maribyrnong, existing service providers and community and cultural organisations. An EOI process will take place to determine a suitable provider, and I ask that Minister Stitt join me on a walk-through of the proposed site, where we can discuss how this innovative project can help meet the needs of residents.

**Katamatite-Shepparton Road**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (17:03): (1172) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is for the minister to come and see the appalling



works that have been done on repairing the Katamatite-Shepparton Road. This busy stretch of road is one of the worst in my electorate. It has massive potholes and a broken road surface. Ben Ladson, a local constituent and former councillor, posted a video yesterday, the day the works were done, and said the works are a disgrace and done to an absolutely unacceptable standard. Ben said that he has never seen such a poor attempt at road repairs in his life. When you view the footage it is actually hard to comprehend that this level of inadequate repairs is actually happening. It is an absolute disgrace. The minister, as part of her duty of care as Minister for Roads and Road Safety, needs to come and see firsthand the unacceptable, unsafe standard of the road repairs that are being done under her watch. You really do have to see it to believe it.

The \$976 million for regional roads must prioritise the most unsafe and damaged roads and must ensure that the money is being spent on quality road repairs and road maintenance, not the disgraceful works and short-term patch-up jobs that we see here on the Katamatite-Shepparton Road, not poor short-term fixes that continually need to be redone. The Department of Transport and Planning's performance measures in the recent state budget show that the Allan Labor government is maintaining less than a third of the road repairs it did in the past. Despite claiming spending record amounts on roads, Labor's own budget papers show a shocking 93 per cent reduction in roads patching and a 14 per cent reduction on road resealing and rehabilitation. Not only are the works been done poorly, we have also had a reduction, which is astounding considering the increasing number of appalling and unsafe roads that are crumbling and full of potholes. There is a lot of catch-up, yet this government are spending less and nowhere near meeting the road maintenance needs. That is putting lives at risk.

My office is inundated with complaints about the appalling and unsafe condition of our roads, and this is only one of many roads across my electorate in urgent need of repair. I have also been contacted by a transport company who said that damage to their vehicles caused by the state of the roads is costing them thousands of dollars every single month. I jumped in a truck recently and experienced firsthand the amount of potholes it hit and the impact on the truck. It was shocking. I also asked the minister to do the same previously. It is crucial that the minister comes into the regions and sees the level of damage to our roads. Again I urge the minister to come and see the latest appalling road repairs done on the Katamatite-Shepparton Road.

### **Western Freeway upgrade**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (17:05): (1173) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the completed business case and delivery of the Western Freeway upgrade between Melton and Caroline Springs. The Western Freeway is a critical transport link for my constituents and for the broader western region of Melbourne. It connects our growing outer suburbs to key employment, education and of course health precincts and serves as a vital freight route. However, the current state of the freeway between Melton and Caroline Springs no longer meets the needs of a rapidly expanding population. Residents in suburbs such as Caroline Springs, Aintree, Truganina and beyond are experiencing worsening traffic congestion on a daily basis. I regularly hear from constituents who spend too long in their cars away from their families because of congestion on this stretch of road.

I acknowledge the significant work already undertaken by our government, the Victorian Allan Labor government, in partnership with the Australian government to develop a comprehensive business case for the Western Freeway upgrade. This is an important step in ensuring that any works delivered are well planned, cost-effective and tailored to future demand. I also welcome the federal commitment of \$1.1 billion towards this project, which demonstrates the recognition of its importance on a national level. The project will have a profound impact on the lives of people in Melbourne's west. Improving this critical transport link will support safer, more reliable journeys, unlock economic opportunities and of course improve access to jobs and services. Residents in Kororoit are eager to understand what comes next and when these long-awaited improvements will become a reality.

**Bowel cancer**

**Chris CREWTHER** (Mornington) (17:07): (1174) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update on initiatives being undertaken to prevent early-onset bowel cancer in Victoria. Australia currently has one of the highest rates of early-onset bowel cancer in the world, with increasing diagnoses in people under the age of 50. This is deeply concerning. Bowel Cancer Australia is leading the way in advocating for better outcomes. One of their key campaigns, Never2Young, calls for faster diagnosis through timely GP referrals, aiming to ensure younger Australians showing symptoms of bowel cancer can receive a colonoscopy within 30 days of symptom onset. This is critically important. We know that delays in diagnosis can result in cancer being detected at a more advanced stage, making it harder to treat and more devastating for families. I commend Bowel Cancer Australia on their tireless work. Through their advocacy they are driving awareness, education and research, all aimed at improving early detection and outcomes for young Australians. These efforts are nothing short of life-saving.

I am also proud to be playing a part in raising awareness. This Saturday, 31 May, I will be walking the entire 21-kilometre length of the Mornington electorate coastline to raise funds and awareness for Bowel Cancer Australia. I am also pushing for faster GP referrals for younger Australians within 30 days of symptom onset as well as for further research funding into the causes and prevention of early-onset bowel cancer. I will be joined for parts by my chief of staff Donna Hope, who is herself a survivor of early-onset bowel cancer, having been diagnosed with advanced bowel cancer at the age of just 43. She is also a hardworking voluntary ambassador for Bowel Cancer Australia. I will also be joined in parts by some family members locally who have tragically lost loved ones in their 30s to this terrible disease. I welcome anyone who would like to walk with us for all or part of the trek, and I encourage anyone who can to donate to support this cause. They can see my Facebook or Instagram pages for more details or go to [bit.ly/chriswalk](https://bit.ly/chriswalk) to donate. Even if you cannot join the walk, please join for a special event between 11 o'clock and 11:30 am this Saturday at Mornington Park.

I also want to give a special thanks to Mornington Peninsula News Group and publisher Cam McCullough, who generously donated a full whole-page ad about this event. Thanks to all local media, social media and radio stations who have helped to promote the event. Lastly, a sincere thanks to the many local small businesses in Mornington, Mount Martha and Mount Eliza who have supported this effort by allowing me to put up posters and to spread the word. Your community spirit means so much.

**Merri-bek City Council**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (17:10): (1175) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Local Government, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the obligations for local government authorities under the Local Government Act 2020 to meaningfully engage and consult with local communities before making major policy decisions, including for Merri-bek City Council. Following strong community advocacy, I was very proud to welcome the \$2 million federal Albanese Labor government investment to develop the Coburg North sports hub master plan, thanks to Peter Khalil, the member for Wills, and Ged Kearney, the member for Cooper. The master plan aims to partner with Merri-bek council and local groups to develop a shared precinct-wide vision for upgrades in Coburg North and the Newlands corridor, including for Coburg Little Athletics, Coburg Basketball Association, Coburg Table Tennis Club, East Coburg Cricket Club, Coburg Lions junior football club, Coburg Olympic pool group and later the Friends of Merri Creek and Friends of Edgars Creek groups. After appointing consultants to conduct round tables, interviews and pop-ups, receiving 441 survey responses, Merri-bek released the draft master plan for consultation from 9 April to 11 May. After the unveiling of the draft master plan, it contained some welcome elements, including proposed upgrades and enhancements for the Coburg outdoor pool and Coburg Table Tennis Club, short-term refurbishments for the Coburg athletics track and basketball stadium precinct and further revitalisation for Merri Creek and Edgars Creek corridors.

However, sadly, locals have also raised varying concerns about the draft plan and its consultation process. No one-on-one interviews with key athletics stakeholders like Coburg Harriers, Little Athletics and other clubs noted in the 9 April council report were conducted. There were no dedicated consultation pop-ups at key sites such as Coburg athletics track and the basketball stadium or during football or cricket game days, and the consultation period was launched during the school holidays, Easter and Anzac Day long weekends and ran for only four weeks or so, limiting meaningful community input. But it is the draft plan's proposal to remove the dedicated Coburg athletics track and field precinct, the Harold Stevens track, that has created the most community concern and opposition. First established in 1896, the Coburg Harriers are one of the oldest sporting organisations in Victoria. Joined by Coburg Little Athletics in 1966, Coburg's athletics community has been competing on this dedicated Coburg North site since 1971, and it has proudly produced many Australian athletic icons, including Raelene Boyle, Peter Norman, Herb Elliott and Alan Wells. With over 15,000 people coming through the precinct every year, including many school carnivals, the track continues to support many health and wellbeing outcomes.

However, this rich history is now under threat and under risk because the draft plan is proposing the amalgamation of the Coburg athletic precinct with the neighbouring Jackson Reserve, merging the athletics, football and cricket into one grass field proposal, replacing the dedicated athletics track and field precinct with a shared grass oval and grass track, providing no dedicated space for long jump, high jump, javelin or shot-put, and providing no shade, seating or basic facilities for athletes or spectators. This means dozens of local schools across the community would miss out on many school carnivals. Essentially the plan has been received like a shot-put through the face, a discus to the back of the head and a javelin through the heart by the local community, and many others are calling for the track to be saved. 1500 signatures have been signed on the change.org petition, and the local schools and local sporting clubs are all supportive.

#### **Ringwood North shopping centre**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (17:13): (1176) My adjournment matter is for the Minister of Police, and the action I seek is an immediate briefing from Victoria Police regarding the escalating violence at the Ringwood North shopping centre. The government must explain what will be done right now, not under a future scheme, to protect the families, retail workers and small business owners under threat. In just the last eight weeks a tobacco store that has recently opened in the Ringwood North shopping centre has been targeted by two violent ram raids and an attempted firebombing. This is not a remote industrial site; it is a suburban shopping strip directly across the road from a primary school, surrounded by family homes, small businesses and local families going about their daily lives.

I met last week with local small business owners at the centre who are terrified because of the increased criminal activity. I spoke with the owners corporation, who have seen just in one store a 15 to 20 per cent drop in trade since the attacks began. Why? Because customers do not want to break through crime scene tape on their way to buy a loaf of bread, and they sure do not want to risk being part of the fallout. Other local business owners have also spoken to me about a decrease in their trade and are extremely alarmed at the ongoing criminal activity. The retailers also raised with me that some of their casual staff, who are still in high school, working after-school jobs, feel terrified to come to work.

Under this government, organised crime has been allowed to run rampant. We now know through media reports and leaked government briefings that Victorian government agencies were repeatedly warned about the dangerous illicit tobacco trade before the tobacco wars exploded. Across Victoria there have now been more than 135 bombings linked to the tobacco wars. This is the cost of the government turning the other way and then dragging its feet on stopping crime. Even now, despite finally announcing a tobacco licensing scheme, there is no clarity as to how this will put an end to this pervasive issue.

Minister, while my community has to sit around waiting until your long-overdue tobacco licensing scheme takes effect, they need to know what you are doing to stop the violence right now, not in a

month's time, and they need you to explain exactly how this new scheme is going to stop these violent attacks in my community. This is not just about one tobacco store; this is about the safety of an entire community, a community that has been left in the crossfire.

### **Combined Probus Club of Syndal**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (17:15): (1177) As we all know, we have to be factual in this place, so it is very easy for me to say that we all love our Probus clubs in our area. Recently, not too long ago, I had the great privilege of joining the Combined Probus Club of Syndal in my patch for their AGM. We got to chat to a lot of the members there, and it was a fantastic time. We discussed a bit on the day with Tricia Fitzgerald, who is the president down there, who raised an issue about the fee to change the constitution, which they need to do. They are a little concerned about the amount of the fee. So my adjournment item this evening is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action that I seek from the minister is to provide an update for Tricia and all the members at the Combined Probus Club of Syndal on what options there are to possibly have a reduced fee for them to change their constitution. I look forward to his response.

### **Victoria Planning Provisions**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (17:16): (1178) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is that the government amend the Victoria Planning Provisions so that people no longer need to seek permits to make small sustainable changes like adding solar panels and rainwater tanks to heritage buildings. I recently visited the home of Conor King, a Victorian resident who was never made aware that he was meant to apply for a planning permit before installing solar panels on the roof of his house, which is under a heritage overlay. Six months after he installed them Conor went through an unrelated application process with the council in order to do renovations to his house, and the council was dismayed to learn about his illicit solar panels and instructed him to remove four of the 12 panels. This instruction seemed to be an arbitrary compromise based not on protecting the structural integrity of the home or even making sure that the terrifying sight of a handful of solar panels was not visible to the poor innocent onlookers on the street but simply on finding the midpoint between the relevant planning regulations and the fact that Conor unintentionally had to ask for forgiveness rather than permission.

Clause 43.01-1 of amendment VC149 of the Victoria Planning Provisions states that owners of a heritage home need to apply for a planning permit before making a range of minor changes relating to sustainability – not only solar panels but also rainwater tanks, EV charging stations, heating and cooling systems and hot-water systems, including heat pumps. Crucially, these requirements do not appear to relate to any kind of concern for the heritage buildings themselves. A permit is only necessary if the works are visible from a street other than a lane or public park. If they are not visible, it seems you can go for your life. In contrast, the resident points out that the array of TV aerials atop every house are clearly not in keeping with the aesthetics of the century-old houses in his neighbourhood, but that does not seem to be a problem.

I have got enough faith in the Victorian public to think that passers-by would be able to handle the sight of a solar panel on the roof of a heritage building without falling over in horror in the street. Surely by this stage of the climate crisis, requiring home owners to go through a permit application process just to install something as simple as a rainwater tank which collects the free water that falls from the sky, for no other reason than for someone else's idea of aesthetics, should be considered an unnecessary barrier working against householders doing their bit to make their homes as sustainable as possible.

### **Workplace surveillance**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (17:19): (1179) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Industrial Relations in the other place and concerns the parliamentary inquiry into workplace surveillance. The action that I seek is that the minister provide an update on how the

government's response to this inquiry will impact workers in my electorate of Narre Warren South. I was glad to hear that the inquiry's committee recently tabled its final report. The inquiry was requested by our Allan Labor government and looked at the nature of workplaces and technology, both of which have changed quite significantly over the years. The misuse of workplace surveillance does impact workers' mental and physical health and causes potential privacy, data and security risks as well. It leads to distrust in the workplace and greater inefficiency, with stressed staff taking more time off, and this of course ultimately leads to really poor productivity in the workplace. In my experience, a strong, happy and positive workplace often produces the best productivity and financial outcomes as well. The growing popularity of working from home has also led employers to find new and often unscrupulous ways to monitor their workers remotely. The monitoring of productivity for legitimate reasons is one thing, but this must be balanced with the protection of workers rights and their health and safety as well. Workers are not robots. It should not be forgotten that workers are human beings with human needs and human frailties as well. I will just finish by saying that this Labor government will always continue to fight to protect workers rights.

### Planning policy

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (17:21): (1180) I rise tonight to raise a matter for the Minister for Planning. The matter I raise is whether the Minister for Planning can join me to meet with a number of groups in my electorate to discuss the government's recent planning changes. In particular my constituents and I want to talk about the impact of the government's planning takeover in areas like the electorate I represent of Hawthorn. I think we all understand in this place and across the community that we need more housing in this state; in fact we need housing across the country and indeed across the world. We see many parts of the world that are struggling with the provision of housing. No-one is arguing against the proposition that we need more housing, but I have said previously in this chamber and elsewhere in the community that I think one of the challenges the government has is to address what are emerging, and in some cases longstanding, inequities in the way the state's capital program has been rolled out over a large number of years.

Tonight I do not propose to single any one side of politics out. I think it is a general challenge that we have in this state that we have parts of Melbourne and outer Melbourne in particular that are in desperate need of more infrastructure to support what are growing communities. If I go to a citizenship ceremony in Casey or out in Wyndham or Melton or any other of the areas of our state that are growing at enormous rates with new Australians in particular, who are just excited and aspirational and want the best for their families and their communities, and I look around those areas, for a long time there has been a dearth of public transport and a dearth of other kinds of community infrastructure – not just roads and public transport but all manner of things, such as community halls and places where people can meet, congregate and engage in normal social activities. They do not have that. One of the concerns I have is not just for my area, the area I represent – because I do not believe you can double the number of dwellings and also make commensurate investments in the infrastructure that will support the populations that go with that. At the same time, if you persist down that policy path, you are also neglecting those growth corridors in particular, but not solely, and the infrastructure they will need.

I looked at the government's capital program for the next financial year. There is about \$21.3 billion or so that is invested in infrastructure. Most of it is in large projects. The new projects that are coming on line do not appear to be addressing a lot of the choke points right around the growth corridors of Melbourne and in the regions that want more growth but need that infrastructure investment. There is a balanced way to deliver the housing that our state needs, but if done wrongly, concentrating it in places where you cannot meet it with new infrastructure while also neglecting those growth corridors that miss out, it means that we all lose out. We can do better.

### Responses

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:24): I want to thank the member for Mornington for the question and for raising with me his concern about the number of young people being diagnosed with bowel cancer. Indeed we have seen an increase in the number of young people receiving that diagnosis, and research is currently unclear on why this may well be the case. However, bowel cancer is in many cases caused by a range of lifestyle factors. I want to be clear that I am not in any way indicating that individuals are responsible for this, but we do live in a world where it is harder to be able to eat good, healthy food every day. We live in a world where it is harder to get the amount of exercise that we really need to get in order to be healthy and well. So there are a number of structural issues that exist that mean that cancers like bowel cancer are becoming increasingly prevalent.

As I am sure the member knows, while we have a screening program in place here in Australia, it is currently only for people over 50. But I would say too – and I take this opportunity to let the member and others know – that we are very concerned about the low take-up of the bowel cancer screen. It is of course distributed to all Australians over 50. I have done the screen every second year when it arrives. It is simple and easy to do. We need to get over that ick factor that is associated with the bowel screen and just encourage our constituents to take up that opportunity. I also want to commend the member for his own fundraising and awareness efforts, which came to me in my Facebook feed. I did not automatically press delete. I actually read the member's Facebook post in relation to this, and I commend him for it.

The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that she seeks is that the minister join her to look at what the member claims are some substandard road repairs in her electorate. The member for Kororoit raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. She is seeking an update from the minister in relation to works that are underway on the Western Freeway, which is obviously a very significant road not just to the member herself and her constituents but indeed to all the Labor members that represent the western suburbs of Melbourne. The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government, and the action he is seeking is that he be updated on the community consultation requirements that local governments are subject to. He took this opportunity to express the dissatisfaction of many of his constituents with the Merri-bek council's consultation methods.

The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action that she seeks is that she receive a briefing on policing of the Ringwood North shopping centre. The member for Ashwood raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs on behalf of a local Probus club but on a matter, I am sure, which is a concern to many community groups. The action he is seeking is that the minister look to reduce fees for community groups like Probus clubs to change their constitution. The member for Brunswick raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and the action he is seeking is that the minister seek to amend planning provisions that require permits for small, sustainable renovations and upgrades for homes that have heritage overlays.

The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the attention for the Minister for Industrial Relations. The matter that the member raised is that he receive an update on the government response to the parliamentary inquiry into workplace surveillance, and I want to commend the member for all the work that he has done in a former life and as a union leader representing the interests of some of Australia's and Victoria's lowest paid workers. I am thinking of farm workers in particular but also workers in logistics and warehousing sectors. The member for Hawthorn raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and the action he seeks is that the minister join him to discuss the impact that planning changes being made by our government will have on his constituents of Hawthorn.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, did you respond to the member for Footscray?

## ADJOURNMENT

Wednesday 28 May 2025

Legislative Assembly

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**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** The member for Footscray, the first one up on her feet, had a very simple and precise request for the Minister for Mental Health: that the minister join her in Footscray to see the site for a multidisciplinary response to the many complex mental health and other issues that some of the member for Footscray's constituents face. My apologies to the member for Footscray.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, members. Thank you to the parliamentary staff and clerks, as always. The house now stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 5:30 pm.**