



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 19 March 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    |
| Cleland, Annabelle             | Euroa            | Nat    | Pearson, Danny                 | Essendon           | ALP    |
| Connolly, Sarah                | Laverton         | ALP    | Pesutto, John                  | Hawthorn           | Lib    |
| Couzens, Christine             | Geelong          | ALP    | Read, Tim                      | Brunswick          | Greens |
| Crewther, Chris                | Mornington       | Lib    | Richards, Pauline              | Cranbourne         | ALP    |
| Crugnale, Jordan               | Bass             | ALP    | Richardson, Tim                | Mordialloc         | ALP    |
| D'Ambrosio, Liliana            | Mill Park        | ALP    | Riordan, Richard               | Polwarth           | Lib    |
| De Martino, Daniela            | Monbulk          | ALP    | Rowswell, Brad                 | Sandringham        | Lib    |
| de Vietri, Gabrielle           | Richmond         | Greens | Sandell, Ellen                 | Melbourne          | Greens |
| Dimopoulos, Steve              | Oakleigh         | ALP    | Settle, Michaela               | Eureka             | ALP    |
| Edbrooke, Paul                 | Frankston        | ALP    | Smith, Ryan <sup>9</sup>       | Warrandyte         | Lib    |
| Edwards, Maree                 | Bendigo West     | ALP    | Southwick, David               | Caulfield          | Lib    |
| Famham, 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

# CONTENTS

---

|   |      |
|---|------|
| BILLS   |      |
| Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 ..... | 1015 |
| Introduction and first reading .....  | 1015 |
| BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE   |      |
| Notices of motion and orders of the day .....   | 1015 |
| DOCUMENTS   |      |
| Documents .....   | 1015 |
| BILLS   |      |
| Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024.....              | 1016 |
| Council's amendments.....   | 1016 |
| Family Violence Protection Amendment Bill 2025.....   | 1016 |
| Royal assent .....  | 1016 |
| MEMBERS STATEMENTS  |      |
| Melba College.....  | 1016 |
| Wedding anniversary .....   | 1016 |
| Roberts McCubbin Primary School.....  | 1016 |
| Box Hill electorate Rotary clubs.....   | 1016 |
| Springfield Park, Box Hill North .....  | 1017 |
| Gippsland East electorate roads .....   | 1017 |
| Gippsland East electorate emergency services.....   | 1017 |
| Mordialloc College.....   | 1017 |
| Construction industry .....   | 1017 |
| Mansfield pottery festival .....  | 1018 |
| Health and Community Services Union.....  | 1018 |
| Centorrino Technologies.....  | 1018 |
| Essendon Fields Hart Precinct.....  | 1018 |
| Community safety .....  | 1018 |
| Ashwood electorate schools .....  | 1019 |
| Flood recovery .....  | 1019 |
| Dr Shahbaz Chaudhry .....   | 1020 |
| Clarinda electorate.....  | 1020 |
| Crime prevention.....   | 1020 |
| International Women's Week .....  | 1020 |
| Sunraysia Lifeline project ride .....   | 1021 |
| Ripon electorate community leaders .....  | 1021 |
| Narre Warren North electorate student leaders.....  | 1021 |
| Endeavour Hills Junior Football Club .....  | 1022 |
| Greenvale electorate Syrian community .....   | 1022 |
| Down Syndrome Victoria.....   | 1022 |
| Chaldean Babylonian and Assyrian New Year .....   | 1022 |
| Ramadan.....  | 1022 |
| Northcote electorate community projects .....   | 1023 |
| Monbulk electorate student leaders .....  | 1023 |
| Montrose bushfire.....  | 1023 |
| Ballan Autumn Festival .....  | 1024 |
| Ramadan.....  | 1024 |
| STATEMENTS ON PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS   |      |
| Environment and Planning Committee .....  | 1024 |
| Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply .....   | 1024 |
| Public Accounts and Estimates Committee .....   | 1025 |
| Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates.....   | 1025 |
| Economy and Infrastructure Committee .....  | 1026 |
| Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users .....              | 1026 |
| Environment and Planning Committee .....  | 1027 |
| Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply .....   | 1027 |
| Economy and Infrastructure Committee .....  | 1028 |
| Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users .....              | 1028 |
| Economy and Infrastructure Committee .....  | 1029 |
| Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users .....              | 1029 |
| BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE   |      |
| Notices of motion .....   | 1030 |
| BILLS   |      |

# CONTENTS

---

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024..... | 1030 |
| Council's amendments.....  | 1030 |
| MEMBERS  |      |
| Minister for Government Services.....  | 1059 |
| Absence.....   | 1059 |
| QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS                                |      |
| Victoria Police.....   | 1059 |
| Ministers statements: TAFE.....  | 1060 |
| Victoria Police.....   | 1060 |
| Ministers statements: school breakfast clubs.....                                | 1061 |
| Construction industry.....   | 1062 |
| Ministers statements: energy policy.....   | 1063 |
| Housing.....   | 1064 |
| Ministers statements: outdoor recreation.....                                    | 1065 |
| Construction industry.....   | 1066 |
| Ministers statements: Smile Squad.....   | 1068 |
| CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS   |      |
| Eildon electorate.....   | 1069 |
| Narre Warren South electorate.....   | 1069 |
| Lowan electorate.....  | 1069 |
| Bass electorate.....   | 1069 |
| Caulfield electorate.....  | 1070 |
| Tarnait electorate.....  | 1070 |
| South Barwon electorate.....   | 1070 |
| Bayswater electorate.....  | 1070 |
| Benambra electorate.....   | 1071 |
| Pascoe Vale electorate.....  | 1071 |
| BILLS  |      |
| Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024.....   | 1071 |
| Second reading.....  | 1071 |
| GRIEVANCE DEBATE   |      |
| Crime.....   | 1083 |
| Leader of the Opposition.....  | 1087 |
| Health system.....   | 1089 |
| Leader of the Opposition.....  | 1092 |
| Government performance.....  | 1096 |
| Leader of the Opposition.....  | 1100 |
| Government performance.....  | 1103 |
| Leader of the Opposition.....  | 1105 |
| MEMBERS  |      |
| Member for Prahran.....  | 1109 |
| Inaugural speech.....  | 1109 |
| BILLS  |      |
| Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024.....   | 1113 |
| Second reading.....  | 1113 |
| ADJOURNMENT  |      |
| Yarra Hills Secondary College.....   | 1120 |
| Education funding.....   | 1121 |
| Royal Flying Doctor Service.....   | 1121 |
| Boronia train station.....   | 1122 |
| Suburban Rail Loop.....  | 1122 |
| Wendouree electorate LGBTIQ+ community.....                                      | 1123 |
| Housing.....   | 1123 |
| Bellarine electorate schools.....  | 1124 |
| Kew electorate schools.....  | 1124 |
| Community safety.....  | 1125 |
| Responses.....   | 1126 |

**Wednesday 19 March 2025**

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

***Bills*****Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025*****Introduction and first reading***

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:34): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:34): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:34): It is a bill to amend the Victorian Energy Efficient Target Act 2007 to ensure the emissions and energy savings benefits of the Victorian energy upgrades, or VEU, program continue to be achieved and that the program remains fit for purpose to continue supporting Victoria's transition away from fossil gas.

**Read first time.**

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

***Business of the house*****Notices of motion and orders of the day****Notices given.****Mary-Anne Thomas having given notice:**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, as a member of the Standing Orders Committee, does the government have the power to gag this chamber on standing order changes that have not been through the Standing Orders Committee?

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a question for the Chair. This is a matter for the house.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Brighton knows that you cannot ask the Speaker or the Chair questions. If you wish to discuss the matter, you can come and speak to me in my chambers.

**Further notices given.**

**The SPEAKER** (09:39): General business, notices of motion 41 to 68 and orders of the day 7 and 8, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

***Documents*****Documents****Incorporated list as follows:**

**DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

*Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986* – Certificate under s 7.

*Bills***Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024***Council's amendments*

**The SPEAKER** (09:40): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024 with amendments.

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

**Family Violence Protection Amendment Bill 2025***Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (09:40): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Family Violence Protection Amendment Bill 2025.

*Members statements***Melba College**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (09:41): With the Victorian state budget to be announced in around two months, I want to speak on one of my terrific local schools, Melba College. Melba College have been patiently waiting for the funding to complete stage 3 of their school build. Over the years funding has been promised repeatedly and even withdrawn in one budget, leaving the school and wider community feeling disheartened by the process and left without any timeframe on the completion of their school. With stage 1 of the school build completed in 2018 and then stage 2 shortly after in 2020, when will the school finally see stage 3 completed? It is so important if you are going to invest in the redevelopment of a school that you actually finish the job. It is now five years on, and the school is still in limbo as to when they will see the funding to complete their school. I urge the Minister for Education to ensure that the funding for the stage 3 works at Melba College is delivered in the 2025–26 state budget. The new oval and performing arts space would be a true asset to not only the school but also the broader community. The school and broader community have waited long enough. Now is the time to deliver on your promise and deliver the funding to complete the long-overdue stage 3 works at Melba College.

**Wedding anniversary**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (09:42): On another matter, I take the opportunity to wish my wife happy anniversary for our 20 years of marriage.

**The SPEAKER:** Congratulations.

**Roberts McCubbin Primary School**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (09:42): Congratulations to Roberts McCubbin Primary School. Last week I went to the 30th Roberts McCubbin art show. It is a fantastic initiative by the school. They do put a lot of focus on art at that school. It is a fabulous fundraiser at the school and also an opportunity to showcase not just local professional artists but also up-and-coming artists, including some former students.

**Box Hill electorate Rotary clubs**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (09:43): I also want to give a shout-out to all of our local Rotary clubs – Whitehorse Rotaract, the Rotary Club of Box Hill Burwood, the Rotary Club of Box Hill Central and the Rotary Club of Mont Albert & Surrey Hills – for putting on another fantastic International Women's Day breakfast on 4 March, a wonderful event that raises money for a charity that was started in Box Hill, Dream Stitches, which is really focused on improving the skills of migrant women.

**Springfield Park, Box Hill North**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (09:43): Can I also talk about some of our local sports projects that are coming up in Whitehorse and particularly in the Box Hill electorate. They are moving leaps and bounds ahead during this season. For Springfield Park netball courts we committed \$1.5 million at the last election, and I am pleased to see that works are underway.

**Gippsland East electorate roads**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (09:44): With the budget coming up we seriously need major investment in our regional roads. We had the federal government recently announce a roads package, but it was predominantly for urban roads, with nothing for the regions. In my electorate we have 'road hazard ahead' signs that have been in place for four years in the same location – four years without fixing the road properly. That is on the Bullumwaal Road. We have got similar situations on the Monaro Highway and Princes Highway east. We need significant investment in our roads, not another budget cut.

**Gippsland East electorate emergency services**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (09:45): With that budget coming up I also want to put on the record the need for this government to knock off a few of the requirements in Gippsland East. For some time the Lakes Entrance fire brigade and the Metung fire brigade have been seeking new stations. We have Orbost police station and Maffra police station – all emergency services – in dire need of an upgrade. I am respectful of the fact we will not get all of those in this budget, but there are too many budgets going by when we are getting none of them, and I encourage the minister to please address that. I also want to put on the record the need for better ambulance responses in Omeo. We have a mountain bike park there, and as we saw in Derby in Tasmania, accidents rise when you have a facility like that. The government needs to consider better emergency services in the Omeo district.

**Mordialloc College**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (09:45): Recently I had the opportunity to join the Mordialloc College community and our federal member Mark Dreyfus, the federal member for Isaacs and Attorney-General of Australia, to acknowledge the amazing student leaders and the contributions they make at Mordialloc College. This is a school that has seen significant growth and upgrades that the Allan and Andrews Labor governments have supported significantly. We have seen an upgrade to their stages in their performing arts centre, basketball court upgrades and stadium upgrades, and then we saw the amazing junior learning centre investments in recent years. To meet the student leaders recently – Eden Handfield, Catherine Cole, Madison Sinn and Auburn Hewet – and hear their vision and values and their focus for the future was absolutely outstanding.

We have got an allocation and a commitment that we made for \$12.6 million to upgrade Mordialloc College as part of the next stage, their STEAM learning centre, which is a continued investment in the future of our students, because we want the first-class education there at Mordialloc College, which is state leading, to be matched with first-class facilities.

We have seen the school grow over the time I have been privileged enough to represent the Mordialloc district, going from 570 students to now 1250. People move into our community choosing the great public education like that at Mordialloc College because of the success, the values and the leadership. A big shout-out goes to principal Rachael Stone for all the work that she does.

**Construction industry**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:47): The Big Build projects are in total disarray. Corruption, rorts and criminal misconduct once again highlight the incompetence and mismanagement of the Allan Labor government. Cost overruns mean regional communities and councils in growing suburbs are being neglected. Funds are being wasted, leaving nothing for those outside Melbourne and the

government's favoured projects. The Allan Labor government is failing to manage both finances and major projects, and the people of Victoria are bearing the brunt of it.

### **Mansfield pottery festival**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:47): There are always plenty of mad things happening in Mansfield. On the long weekend the Mansfield & District – MAD – Potters pottery festival was held. The local effort, talent and creative thinking to make this event a success are to be commended. I was delighted to open the event at the Clay Stables, the community pottery studio named in memory of Joy Forrest. Bill Forrest was there to unveil a plaque dedicated to Joy, a keen potter. The stables, which are the old police stables, were opened on the night as well. Mansfield shire saw the need to retain the stables and had them lovingly and authentically restored. Once they had done that, they needed a tenant, and the MAD potters were the perfect fit. The exhibition held there showcased the incredible talents of our local potters and visitors from afar. It was so good to see activities in the main street – hands-on activities – and the primary school had also got involved and made pottery things for sale. I wish them the best there. There are so many wheels in Mansfield it is unbelievable.

### **Health and Community Services Union**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (09:49): The Health and Community Services Union – HACSU – Breaking the Silence project is a pioneering initiative designed to confront challenges of gender-based violence and sexual harassment within the disability and mental health sectors. Training around 1000 disability workers and 600 mental health workers, the program seeks to equip workers with best practice response to gendered violence and sexual harassment, enhancing their ability to create safer workplace environments. The findings from the work will be shared with WorkSafe Victoria and the Victorian community.

As part of recent International Women's Day celebrations I would like to acknowledge HACSU's leadership and all of their members, including Deb Gunn, the president; Paul Healey, the state secretary; Rebecca Sprekos, the assistant state secretary; James McWhinney, the lead organiser; and Stephanie Thuesen, the government liaison officer.

### **Centorrino Technologies**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (09:49): Centorrino Technologies in Coburg is an absolutely sensational, inclusive organisation working at the cutting edge of the IT, cyber and digital sectors, servicing clients across federal government, state government, local government, defence, education, health services and the business sector and much more. I thank the founder Adam Centorrino for hosting us, and all of their leaders, including Ross Daniels, Julie Kirk, Domenico Garfi, Nicholas Iacobucci, Phil Milione, Andrew Rankin, Peng Wang, Dean Allright, Emma Schulman and many others. To Gareth Wells a special shout-out. He was a participant in the state's digital jobs program that we funded. He got a new career out of education into the digital sector as a result. I commend the organisation for their work to support more women and First Nations people into IT opportunities.

### **Essendon Fields Hart Precinct**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (09:50): On 27 February I had the honour to officially help open Essendon Fields' new Hart Precinct. Established as Melbourne's first aerodrome in 1921, over the years Essendon Fields has gone on to welcome a generation of migrants and is now a jobs hub for the north-west.

### **Community safety**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (09:50): Our justice system in Victoria is broken. According to the Crime Statistics Agency, in Boroondara, in which my seat of Hawthorn exists, aggravated robberies are up 57 per cent, residential aggravated burglaries are up 43 per cent, motor vehicle thefts are up 27 per cent and thefts from retail stores are up 33 per cent. Not a day goes by, nearly, when a constituent

does not ring my office to raise concerns about community safety and experiences that they have had to endure in our local community. The Allan Labor government has failed to manage justice in our state. Not only has it weakened bail laws in the past, it has cut police resourcing, it has cut youth engagement programs and it has cut outreach programs for at-risk youth. Even this government has now conceded that it got it wrong. My community is fed up.

That is why next Tuesday at 7:30 pm I will be hosting a community safety forum in my electorate with David Southwick, the Shadow Minister for Police and Corrections; Cr Felicity Sinfield, chair of the Boroondara Community Safety Advisory Committee; and representatives from Boroondara Neighbourhood Watch. My community want to be safe on their streets and safe at home and for those that make poor decisions and fall into a life of crime to have a genuine chance at rehabilitation. But that is not going to happen under the Allan Labor government; that will only happen under the next Liberal government.

### Ashwood electorate schools

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (09:52): It has been a busy start to the 2025 school year across the Ashwood district, and I have had the pleasure of visiting the wonderful young people at Pinewood Primary, Syndal South Primary and Mount Waverley North Primary, handing out our all-important prep bags. Not only will all of our littlest learners continue to get the benefits of these prep bags and that bundle, but their reading education will now also be improved by the rollout of our fantastic, statewide phonics program – and a shout-out to the Minister for Education on that one.

I was also able to drop in to some of those schools to present leadership badges to our wonderful grade 6s and SRC leaders. A big shout-out goes to all the captains, vice-captains and school leaders who I met at Essex Heights Primary, Pinewood, Syndal South again and Solway Primary. I also give a very special thankyou and an ‘I think I got away with that one’ to the Holy Family School senior students for their friendly grilling, which I got at the Q and A session last month – what we earn is a topic of concern, apparently.

I also had the honour of attending Salesian College for their high-achievers assembly, where students were recognised for their incredible achievements in 2024. I was very proud to present the Norm Gibbs award to Christos Giakoumatos, recognising his outstanding leadership contributions to our community.

Finally – and I am going to run out of time – I was joined by member for Southern Metro John Berger from the other place when we met the enthusiastic grade 5 students from Ashburton Primary. I will have more to say about them next time.

### Flood recovery

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (09:53): There is \$200 million in federal funding in round 3 of the Disaster Ready Fund. It can only be accessed by state governments to establish a housing resilience program. On 3 February federal Minister for Emergency Management Senator Jenny McAllister wrote to a resident in Rochester in my electorate and said:

... the Victorian government did not request a Resilient Homes Fund program ...

unlike New South Wales and Queensland, which clearly care about their regional residents.

To a question about this on *ABC News* on 21 February Premier Allan said that tailored support drove her decision-making. In that press conference, when asked if she would apply for the third round of this funding after ignoring the first two, with Rochester highlighted as a prime case, she said:

... we do make these applications informed on what communities are telling us and what the need is ...

How many times do you need to hear this message, Premier? Your government has been told over and over. It is in the media and was begged for at length in the parliamentary inquiry into the 2022 floods. 988 homes – that is, 92 per cent of Rochester – along with 60 businesses and shopfronts and thousands

of acres of farmland were drowned by the Campaspe in 2022. There are still more than 200 homes empty there. These people still have not been able to come home.

Applications for round 3 of the Disaster Relief Fund close on 2 April. Premier, you have 15 days to submit project proposals to the National Emergency Management Agency. Millions and millions of dollars are sitting there, and it will not cost your bankrupt budget a single cent.

### **Dr Shahbaz Chaudhry**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (09:55): I would like to acknowledge Dr Shahbaz Chaudhry and his wonderful family for organising another wonderful iftar dinner this year. It is Ramadan, and it is good to see that, coming from a humble beginning, in their new life here Dr Shahbaz is a medical practitioner and their two daughters are also in the medical field. Dr Shahbaz's contributions to the multicultural community from a healthcare perspective should be acknowledged, and I thank him and his family for their hospitality.

### **Clarinda electorate**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (09:55): It has been great to be out doorknocking over the last few weeks in Clarinda, Cheltenham, Mentone and Dingley Village. It has been great to hear the positivity about the electorate but also to acknowledge the concern of constituents. For example, Mary from Cheltenham expressed concern around crimes, the importance of quality public health care and consultation on major infrastructure projects and local development, ensuring amenity for local residents. I share her concerns, particularly around community safety, and was glad to hear from the Attorney-General on the government's new tough bail laws to keep Victorians safe, putting community safety above all and creating the toughest bail laws ever for serious offences, targeting repeat offenders of the worst crimes. Thank you to Mary and all of my constituents. The feedback is important to me and important to the government.

### **Crime prevention**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (09:56): The Premier says that locking up kids is going to stop crime, but the evidence tells us that laws that incarcerate people who have not even been convicted of a crime do nothing to improve community safety. Thirty-eight per cent of people in prison are still awaiting trial, and they are disproportionately First Nations women and children and people of colour. Meanwhile the Premier is turning her back on the root causes: insecure housing, family violence and access to health care. Addressing these systemic problems and early intervention is what improves community safety. But in December last year, while obsessing about rising crime, the Premier quietly scrapped the crime prevention portfolio along with 80 per cent of funding for key programs that stop youth offending. Last year the government was investing in 21 outreach and crime prevention programs. Now they are funding just one. Meanwhile they are demolishing public housing, tearing communities apart and failing completely to address drug and alcohol treatment. Currently there is not one single public rehab bed available here in Victoria. If the Premier was serious about addressing crime instead of funnelling money into jails, she would support the essential programs that keep people safe and supported in the first place.

### **International Women's Week**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (09:58): International Women's Week was an incredible celebration of women's achievements, resilience and contributions. For me the celebrations began on Sunday night at the Australia Today International Women's Day gala dinner. It was a wonderful evening, and I am grateful for the celebrations that continued throughout the week, each event reinforcing the strength, resilience and brilliance of women in our communities.

A true highlight was also the International Women's Day gathering in Kororoit on Monday 3 March. This event brought together local professionals and entrepreneurs, fostering an incredible space for knowledge sharing, support and meaningful connections. The vision behind this event came from two

powerhouse women, Niti and Helen, who set out to create an environment where women could connect, collaborate and celebrate one another. We were also privileged to hear from the Minister for Small Business and Employment, my friend Natalie Suleyman, who shared her experiences with us with insight, humour and of course inspiration. Her words reminded us of the importance of economic empowerment and opportunity for all women. To the 60 women who attended the Désir bar and cocktail lounge: thank you for your openness, your stories and your commitment to lifting each other up.

Another standout event was the inspiring International Women's Day celebration hosted in partnership with Sisay Dinku – a true feminist – Multicultural Consulting Services, Women of Wyndham and Multicultural Women of the World. This event was a testament to the incredible economic and social impact of women. As Joan Kirner wisely said, when women support women, women win. So let us keep the momentum going. Happy International Women's Week.

#### **Sunraysia Lifeline project ride**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:59): Last weekend I had the pleasure to do something not only useful but very, very meaningful as well. I was asked to take part in the Sunraysia Lifeline project ride for Lifeline during the month that is the seventh anniversary of my best friend's father, who used to ride a Triumph. He lost his battle with mental illness in March seven years ago. He always used to tell me that I would make a fantastic biker moll, and I finally got to fulfil that dream of his. It was not on the back of his Triumph. I was lucky enough to be hosted by Daniel Fraser, whose last name used to be Andrews – he changed it for obvious reasons. He took me on his 2018 Harley-Davidson Street Glide tourer in twisted cherry to the Patchewollock pub for lunch along with 119 other people that took part. Lifeline managed to raise \$16,000 for their call centre. It costs \$3500 to train a volunteer for the Lifeline call centre in Mildura. It is part of Lifeline Loddon Mallee. I always say I would much rather be useful than decorative, and Sunday was so amazing. Thank you to everyone.

#### **Ripon electorate community leaders**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (10:01): Ripon is full of amazing locals who do so much for our community. Today I want to give a shout-out to some of them that I have seen in action recently. To Kirk McDonald from the Linton Cricket Club and Greg Spratling, Jan Haines and Carolyn Loader from the Carngham Linton Football Netball Club, thank you for all you do for community sport and for your advocacy to get the \$1.4 million rec reserve oval upgrade complete. To Danny McIver, who fought for our country and has since devoted decades to the Maryborough RSL sub-branch, thank you for championing the \$44,000 hall upgrade for local veterans. To Phillip Lewis, congratulations on more than 40 years as an ambulance community officer in Beaufort. I hope you enjoy your much-deserved retirement with lots of golf and Lego. To Ash Turnham and the team at the Ararat fire brigade, thank you for keeping us safe this fire season, and an extra big congratulations to your member Maxi Starick for winning Ararat's Young Citizen of the Year award on Australia Day. And thank you to Sharon Roxburgh and the Save Beaufort PS60 committee, who have championed a community hub at the old Beaufort school site for years and who I was proud to meet with just last week to discuss progress on my \$800,000 election commitment to make this a reality. These local legends care deeply about helping others, and it is an honour to support them as their local MP.

#### **Narre Warren North electorate student leaders**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (10:02): A huge big thankyou to Mossgiel Park, Chalcot Lodge and Thomas Mitchell primary schools, all for inviting me to present their 2025 leaders with their badges at their school assemblies. It was really amazing to see the school give students the opportunity to step into leadership roles, which helps them connect with their classmates and the community in such a really meaningful way. Leadership is a great chance for students not just to grow as individuals but also to see how they work together, make decisions and communicate with each other in the schoolyard. Watching these students get excited about their roles was really amazing to see.

A huge shout-out to the new 2025 school captains. From Mossgiel Park the school captains are Lana, Sophie, Moein and Aston. From Chalcot Lodge we have got Marcel, Urwah, Nithika, Shanzay, Steven, Natasha, Neriah and Onithi. From Thomas Mitchell Primary the captains are Tim, Theruni, Behzah and Sashvika. Congratulations to all of them.

I also had the absolute pleasure of going on the Mossgiel Park Primary School's podcast. The four school captains asked me a lot of great questions, and it was a real honour and a privilege to do that.

#### **Endeavour Hills Junior Football Club**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (10:03): I would also like to do a huge shout-out to the Endeavour Hills Junior Football Club. They had their open day on Saturday. It was very, very wet but there was a great turnout, and I am looking forward to supporting the Eagles throughout the season.

#### **Greenvale electorate Syrian community**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:03): Greenvale is home to people from a diverse array of cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Many have suffered persecution but with extraordinary resilience have found themselves safety and rebuilt new homes and lives in our community here in Melbourne. But these experiences make the ongoing crisis in Syria deeply personal and traumatic for many in my community. As the Prime Minister has said, Australia condemns the murder of innocent civilians and demands that all minorities must be protected. I know that many Syrian Australians in my community are anguished by the events taking place in Syria. Their resilience is a testament to the strength of our community, their voices a reminder of the lasting impact of conflict and displacement, and I stand with them in calling for a just and lasting peace that respects the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all Syrians.

#### **Down Syndrome Victoria**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:04): It was a pleasure to host Down Syndrome Victoria's advisory network at our Parliament recently. Thank you to Matt, Kez, Jenny, Kath and Colby for sharing their perspectives, experiences and insights to improve policy and service delivery in our state. These young people are extraordinary advocates for themselves and the disability community in Victoria. It was a privilege to listen to and learn from them ahead of World Down Syndrome Day this week.

#### **Chaldean Babylonian and Assyrian New Year**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:05): It is a time of renewal in my community, and I am looking forward to celebrating Akitu, Chaldean Babylonian new year 7325, at Mar Corkis parish this weekend and Assyrian new year festival 6775 at Craigieburn Anzac Park next weekend, both events proudly sponsored by this Allan Labor government.

#### **Ramadan**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:05): Ramadan Mubarak. Like so many of my colleagues, I have been fortunate to enjoy the hospitality of the local Muslim community during Ramadan. Thank you to the sisters of the women's auxiliary of the Ahmadiyya mosque, Clyde chapter. The gracious and insightful conversation, the warmth of the community and a particularly loving envelope of friendship and fun was exactly what I needed after a tough day. I am always grateful to this community.

The local south-east Turkish community hosted a wonderful iftar, with Kim Hassan making sure we were all well looked after. I would like to thank Imam Salih Dogan from the local Turkish mosque for leading the prayer for over 100 community members.

Last Friday night the Board of Imams Victoria hosted a terrific iftar in Dandenong. I was grateful to Imam Khalil Hamid from my local mosque for the hospitality. I actually took my husband along, so we had a great date night as well. We met so many people from the local mosques, including of course

friends from the Hallam mosque, whom I know the member for Narre Warren North and I have spent some time with recently.

Sister Nazra Ibrahim and sister Hishama from the Cranbourne mosque as well as my good friends Rabia Safa and Shadab Safa came to the Premier's iftar the other night with other parts of the south-east, including of course Mr Rahimi and Mariam from Bakhtar. We are very lucky to have such a strong community. Ramadan Mubarak again.

#### **Northcote electorate community projects**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (10:06): Victoria's clean energy future is happening right in the Northcote electorate. Three new community batteries will soon be powering Fairfield and Alphington, ensuring more homes can harness cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy. With rooftop solar booming in our community, these new batteries will mean that extra energy is not going to waste. They will store excess solar during the day and feed it back when it is needed most, cutting power bills, reducing reliance on the grid and improving energy resilience. This is what Labor governments do – real investment, real action and real benefits for local people.

While we are powering up our suburbs we are also investing in the open spaces that bring our community together. Community consultation has just opened for upgrades at Merri Common, a project that I have fought hard for, securing \$1.5 million from our Labor government to transform underused rail land into a thriving community space. There are now draft designs across four locations, including the much-loved Peters Reserve, for new seating, native plantings, improved play spaces and a possible bike pump track for local kids. Both Merri Common and Peters Reserve have rich local histories fought for and preserved by local groups, including the Merri Stationeers and the Friends of Peters Reserve. Their passion and persistence has been an incredible contribution to our community. We now have a unique opportunity to shape these parks for future generations.

I urge everyone in my community in Northcote to have their say before the consultation closes. In Northcote we are investing in renewables, revitalising public spaces and putting the community at the heart of every decision.

#### **Monbulk electorate student leaders**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:08): I had the pleasure of presenting leadership badges in the past week to the wonderful student leaders of 2025 at Ferny Creek Primary School and Mount Dandenong Primary School. At Ferny Creek Primary School, congratulations go to Edie, Michael, Emme, Braxton, Asher, Fletcher, Neko, Eliza, Duncan, Penny, Matilda and Iris. And at Mount Dandenong Primary School congratulations go to Lucille, Hojun, Hannah, William, Dean, Chelsea, Gracie, Finlay, Wil, Phoebe, Zoie and Blake. Here is to a wonderful year ahead for the students and staff at both schools.

#### **Montrose bushfire**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:08): On Saturday a fire broke out at Dr Ken Leversha Reserve in Montrose on the boundary of my electorate of Monbulk and the district of Evelyn. The heat and dry fuel created the right conditions for this initial grass and scrub fire to quickly evolve into a bushfire. Later that night gusts turned it from a 'watch and act' to an emergency warning 'take shelter now'. Sadly, there was property loss, and I extend my sincerest thoughts to those who lost their homes or suffered damage. Thankfully, no lives were lost. My own cousin's backyard is charred black. The fire came within a metre of her gas hot-water system on the back of the house. The fear and terror they experienced as the embers attacked their home cannot be overstated.

This fire is a stark reminder to everyone across the hills and foothills to please have an emergency plan for fire and storms. Unreserved thanks to each and every CFA volunteer and all from Forest Fire Management Victoria, FRV and Victoria Police who worked tirelessly to keep the community safe.

Save for their concerted efforts and the help of some rain, it could have been so much worse for so many more.

### **Ballan Autumn Festival**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (10:09): On the weekend I attended the Ballan Autumn Festival. It may have rained on our parade, but it was still a fabulous turnout. This event has been running for many years, and each and every year it brings great joy and many visitors to the gorgeous town of Ballan. I want to give a special shout-out to the committee of volunteers, who worked tirelessly to make this a great event, Miranda, Kevin and all those who make this day so special; and a nod to the sponsors – it would not happen without you; and long-term supporters like Zest Licensed Cafe. The Ballan Autumn Festival is an annual celebration of local culture, creativity and community, and it is one of the oldest regional country fairs in the Moorabool shire. With around 5000 people flocking to the festival each year, it is also one of the most popular.

I had the honour of judging the parade. It is always tough as everyone puts such an effort into their costumes. A big shout-out goes to the community band as best community group, Studio C for best entertainment, the pink Thunderbird for best vintage car and Myrmiong Primary School for best school. King's Horses Equestrian Society won the most original, and Ballan Community Kindergarten won best overall. I give a really heartfelt congratulations to everyone involved, from volunteers, committee members, stallholders, sponsors and all the wonderful folk in the parade.

### **Ramadan**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (10:11): Ramadan Mubarak to my Islamic family observing Ramadan this year. I also want to give a big shout out to Al-Taqwa College for hosting over three nights their Ramadan iftar night market.

## ***Statements on parliamentary committee reports***

### **Environment and Planning Committee**

#### ***Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply***

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (10:11): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the recent Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply. I have spoken about the importance of this report in the house before, and again I would like to thank the chair the member for Wendouree; the deputy chair the member for Morwell, who I know did an excellent job on this report and made a very important contribution; and of course all the committee members and the secretariat for their important work in investigating how the Victorian government can continue to secure the Victorian food supply.

This report really highlights the impact that urban sprawl across Melbourne and in regional cities like the area that I represent in the northern part of Geelong is having on our food producers and the farming industry, and I touched on this in my last contribution on this report. But importantly, this report also highlights just how important the Victorian agricultural sector is to our state and in fact to Australia's food security. The Lara electorate is an important part of this sector. We have many agribusinesses that work hard to ensure our food security. There are a couple of these that I would like to touch on today.

Just last week I saw this work in action when I visited MC Herd in Geelong. This is a family-run lamb and beef food processor. Herd is one of the largest employers in our region, with over 300 staff onsite. They were recognised as Victoria's employer of the year in 2022 at the Victorian Training Awards, recognising their excellence in vocational education and training and their strong focus on quality assurance and sustainable practices. MC Herd are an integral part of Victoria's food supply system, providing high-quality meat products that end in countless meals at homes and restaurants across the state. I am sure everyone in this chamber has had something from Herd before, whether or not you knew it. I know Herd's liver is a particular favourite of my dog Blue.

Another local business that I would like to briefly touch on is Boomaroo Nurseries, which is one of the country's leading vegetable seedlings suppliers. Their role is incredibly important in the agricultural sector, and they work hard to ensure that they have a reliable, quality product to offer growers.

Both of these businesses and many others across the Lara electorate and the state are working to ensure they are focusing on innovation and sustainability when it comes to being that important part of Victoria's food supply system. The reason that I wanted to highlight these businesses is because this report speaks to their futures and the future of all agribusinesses across the state. This is an incredibly important time in which the report has been delivered by this committee in terms of thinking about Victoria's food supply and our food security in the years to come.

I touched on this previously, but we all in this chamber know that there are some challenges when it comes to urbanisation and rapid population growth, particularly in Melbourne's fringes. As I mentioned, this is something that we also experience in Geelong, in particular in the Lara electorate, where we have seen more and more houses being built to house Victorians. Sadly, the impact of that is sometimes we are losing important agricultural land that is feeding Victorians.

There is so much forward-thinking ingenuity out there, but it cannot be done by the sector, the businesses or the farmers alone. This is where the role of government and the role of this report and the recommendations it has made are just so important. One of the strongest things that has come out of this report is a recommendation that the Victorian government develops a whole-of-government Victorian food system strategy. Again, I commend the chair, the member for Wendouree, and the deputy chair for making this big, bold recommendation about what we need to do to secure Victoria's food security future. Another important recommendation that this report made is:

That the Victorian Government consider establishing a Minister for Food with responsibility for the Victorian food system in its entirety ...

This is something that I wholeheartedly support. I think it is a fantastic opportunity to look at food supply but also look at food security in people's homes and food relief – the importance of making sure that every family can put a meal on the table – because at the end of the day that is what this report is about.

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

#### *Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates*

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (10:16): I rise to speak on the 2024–25 budget estimates Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report. On page 87 finding 47 found that more than half of the Department of Transport and Planning's existing capital projects have been delayed in the 2024–25 budget compared to last year and a quarter have been delayed by more than one year. A few projects in the department's capital program have been discontinued in 2024–25, and one of them is the rural and regional roads package for an alternative truck route.

This leads me on to heavy vehicles on our roads. In my capacity as Shadow Minister for Ports and Freight I meet with stakeholders across the portfolio, including port, transport and freight operations, and I am often speaking with people in the transport industry. One of the issues that is often brought to my attention is the lax regime of licensing of heavy vehicles. They feel this is compromising the safety of road usage. It would be fair to assume for a member of the public that there would be adequate training in place before people can drive on our roads, in particular those wanting a heavy vehicle drivers licence. As we all know, to get a normal car licence, our L-plate drivers under the age of 21 need 120 hours of supervised driving before they can drive independently. So how many hours do you think a driver of a heavy vehicle would need to clock up before they can get a licence? Forty-five minutes – yes, you heard me correctly. To get a heavy vehicle licence is actually a 5-hour process and costs \$1000, but only 45 minutes is spent behind the wheel. This is crazy. Large vehicles have large

accidents, and according to the VTA, the Victorian Transport Association, our system trains people to be compliant with the law but not to be competent drivers. That is quite a stark statement.

There is a lack of priority on safety, and the industry has been crying out for this to be addressed by government for years. It is not the industry's lack of willingness; it is the government's lack of need to prioritise increased training, safety and professionalism in the industry. That is what the industry are calling for, and the government are not listening. Austroads conducted a three-year study in 2020 for a national heavy vehicle licensing system with a national competency framework. It is now 2025, and none of the recommendations have been adopted. The state government, through VicRoads, are reviewing those recommendations. This is what is happening right now. Safety is already identified as a priority. There is a study that has been done. It has been five years, and still no change. This is not a government that is sounding like they care about the community and the industry's desire to make their industry more professional and safer. We often see serious fatalities that occur involving trucks. It is a big issue, and rightfully so. So another study is done, and then nothing changes. It is a cycle that keeps perpetuating.

The time for reviews is over. It is time for action to improve road safety for all road users. After a 45-minute process you can get a heavy vehicle licence, so you can then drive something like a garbage truck. The licence-holder can then upgrade to a semitrailer after 12 months. But that does not mean they have been driving that truck for 12 months; they may have been riding a pushbike delivering pizzas for those 12 months.

**Steve Dimopoulos** interjected.

**Roma BRITNELL:** There is nothing wrong with regulation. It is about unintended consequences of regulation. Nobody is saying regulation is a problem.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the Chair.

**Roma BRITNELL:** I think the minister has the wrong impression of the importance of regulation. So, the government takes the next fee of \$1000 and upgrades the licence to allow a person to drive a semitrailer. This is dangerous, and most people driving their cars around trucks would know that there is quite a possible lack of driving experience.

The government are dragging their feet. The Allan Labor government are ignoring our roads, and we know they are ignoring safety. They have just spent absolutely minimal in the regions. Even the children know how bad the roads are in South-West Coast. When I visited her school, young Elyse from Koroit primary school went to the effort to impress upon me just how bad they are. She had gone to such effort she counted from Koroit to Warrnambool and reported there were 385 potholes.

Our roads are so bad that other countries are issuing warnings to their citizens about driving in Victoria. The Chinese Consulate General has warned that traffic risks cannot be ignored as the roads of Victoria are in such a terrible state they are a hazard. We have been banging on about the terrible degradation of our roads for some time, and even other countries are warning people about driving in Victoria. The government are remiss in their – *(Time expired)*

### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users*

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (10:21): It gives me great pleasure to rise this morning and make a contribution on the committee reports. In particular the report that I would like to make my contribution on is from the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users, an inquiry undertaken I believe at the beginning of last year and the end of 2023 by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, which I am proud to be a member of. I would like to just acknowledge the chair of that committee, the member for Bellarine, who did an absolutely amazing job as part of this inquiry – all members did. I would like to acknowledge two members beside me, the member for Glen

Waverley and the member for Pascoe Vale, as well as the member for Kew and the member for Narracan, both former members of this committee.

What we found out as part of this inquiry, through an overwhelming mountain of evidence, is that road behaviours have changed significantly since COVID in particular, and they are yet to change back. We heard evidence from users of active transport, in the main cyclists, from all over Victoria. We did some regional hearings in Shepparton as well. The member for Shepparton is also on this committee, and I could not believe that literally every single person in Shepparton knows who the member for Shepparton is – every single person. Just walk down the street: ‘Hi, Kim. How are you going?’ Just everyone knew her. It was quite impressive, I must say, to be frank.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Correct titles.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Sorry, Deputy Speaker. The member for Shepparton is all right. I am just giving her a shout-out.

We heard an overwhelming amount of evidence from those vulnerable road users, in particular cyclists in this case, from both regional Victoria and also metropolitan Melbourne, who frankly were just dead-set scared to use the road on their bikes. In an environment where we are trying to encourage active transport, trying to encourage people – both adults, kids and adolescents – to get out of the car and to use active transport, being genuinely fearful on the road because of the behaviours of motorists is just not good enough. We heard a mountain of evidence from community groups, from cycling groups and from schools about the fact that we just need better infrastructure to protect our vulnerable road users.

The committee also noted, in line with that, a massive decline in responsible behaviours among road users and among drivers in Melbourne’s metropolitan areas. In noting this, the government supports recommendations 54 through 56. In fact the only recommendation as part of this report that the government did not accept was one around the coroner, and that is simply because we are already doing that. It was just some overlap that we had there. So the government accepted every recommendation within this report.

The decline in responsible behaviours among road users is incredibly troubling. It is incredibly troubling when we are, as a government and a community, consistently and continuously grappling with a road toll that is consistently too high. Making sure that we are putting things in place to curb this behaviour both through education but also through enforcement as well is incredibly important.

In terms of enforcement, we looked at the new infrastructure that we have to catch road users that are using their mobile device whilst driving, which is something that we heard through evidence from Victoria Police is significantly increasing and has been since COVID. That is a really good example of infrastructure that has worked and at the time had caught I think over 300 or 400 people doing that.  
*(Time expired)*

### **Environment and Planning Committee**

#### *Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply*

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (10:26): I rise today to speak on the Environment and Planning Committee *Securing the Victorian Food Supply* report, like the member for Lara as she led off. This was a great committee report to be a part of. When we first got it, we thought the scope of it would be on the urban sprawl, which was part of it, and how it is eating into our food bowl and us needing to protect that, but it was so much more as we travelled around regional Victoria and were able to talk to a multitude of people in a lot of industries inside the food production of Victoria.

We only have to listen to the concerns of people now to know food is a really big issue – being able to put food on the table. As our population grows and we talk about a lot of other stuff here in Victoria, our food supply is probably going to be the most pertinent one that we do need to protect. We are trying to protect the land which is best to actually grow our food, and that seems to be moving further

and further away from all the processing plants. So it was great to be able to talk to some of these producers about the concerns that they do have about being able to transport their livestock and also their produce from country and regional areas into the city to be processed. I was at a family function the other night which was out the back of Clyde and Clyde North. As you drive around there you see the impact of the growth of houses – we need more houses for our growing community – and just how much that has eaten into our food bowl. That is probably one of the greatest areas for providing food for Victoria and especially metropolitan Melbourne, so we need to make sure that we take a deep dive and make sure we can protect these areas so we can continue to secure our food bowl.

One of the other things that was brought up was the initiative of having renewables around Victoria as well. We are all in the same situation where we know that we need the renewable assets, whether it be solar or batteries or wind turbines, as we keep growing and need that use of power. But we need to make sure as it is going on land that we are not sacrificing out the other end and having the unintended consequences of blocking out prime land for our farmers that we can actually grow our produce on and have our cattle and our sheep on, which are paramount to how we live day to day and what we put on the table for our family at night. We need to make sure as all this goes through and as we bring transmission lines on that we are not robbing Peter to pay Paul in the area of being able to have this food, which is so critical to us.

It was great to be able to travel around and talk to farmers about how farming has actually changed. One of the big issues that farmers face is that normally farming is a generational thing. You will have a farmer that is on farming land for a hundred years. They are finding now that the next generation are not wanting to be on the land, which is fine, but it is putting extra pressure on the current farmers. To see a farm being able to run off an iPad is incredible. We went to a place where cattle are indoors and they spend 30 days indoors doing what milking cattle do, and the production of milk has just skyrocketed, because they are looking after their assets, their critical assets, even better.

Our chair the member for Wendouree, the members for Bass, Croydon, Monbulk, Warrandyte and Ripon and our secretariat team loved the fact that we were able to be given this committee report and to travel around, so a big shout-out to them. They have done an incredible, incredible job. We did have some recommendations which I was going to touch on, but I am going to run out of time in 6 seconds. That was our committee report, and I am very happy to have been able to talk on it.

### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users*

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (10:32): I rise today to talk about the committee report into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. To continue on from some of the contribution from the member for Tarneit, I would like to thank the chair of that committee the member for Bellarine, and the committee, including our western suburbs representative on the committee, the member for Tarneit, for producing a comprehensive report with over 60 findings and over 50 recommendations. It is really important. Taking this finer-grain view of how behaviours changed following the pandemic, and particularly around some of the restrictions around travel, this report set out to explore road users behaviour during and after the pandemic and the impact on the safety of vulnerable road users. In going through this report and reflecting on some of the findings, one particular finding that I found quite pertinent to the Werribee electorate is finding 2, which is looking at how:

Restrictions placed during the COVID-19 pandemic created new travel patterns that affected how Victorians used the road during lockdowns and beyond, specifically lower public transport patronage, a preference for travelling by car, greater walking and bike riding ...

and:

These patterns are likely to continue ...

In reading this finding I was transported back to the halcyon by-election days of walking around different parts of my electorate and talking to people in some of the newer estates around the electorate

of Werribee. You would go there at lunchtime or at 1 o'clock and not expect to find anyone at home, but actually there were a lot of people who were working from home. They are either running their own businesses or they are working remotely, and this allows for that flexibility. It means that they are travelling at different times of day, and this is something that we are particularly aware of in the Werribee electorate around some of the pressures around local congestion in Werribee.

One of the findings was that there was more of a turn to active transport and more people using things like pop-up bike infrastructure. Wyndham City Council led the way with that during the pandemic, where they built these paths through to the river walk, the river trail and the Federation Trail along existing roads to help provide safer access options for people as we saw more people choosing to ride and walk. They have had limited long-term results, and I look forward to working with council on other options that we can have in that space.

Another thing that I observed in their findings was that more parents were transporting their children to and from school by car during the pandemic. We are seeing that behaviour changing now, though. I reflect on some of the emails I have received from parents in the Riverwalk estate. They have come to me saying that we need an increase in Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) provided school buses. I thank the minister and her office for some of the work that she has been doing with me on that access, including a survey for school families to be able to fill in to find out what that demand is and adding an extra bus to that Riverwalk route last year.

In concluding my remarks and echoing some of the things that the member for Tarneit said, we have found that those patterns have changed in the way that people are travelling, particularly using our roads in Wyndham. Local congestion is a big factor in Wyndham. It is something that I am very, very aware of as a user of those roads. We know those usage patterns are changing, so that is why it is important that we are building things like our Ison Road link and we are improving traffic flow along Ballan Road. I also thank the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and her office for their great work in arranging a briefing for me today with the director for the metro region from DTP to be able to go through some of these issues more specifically.

I think the great thing about this committee report is that it shows that we need to now be aware of local traffic patterns and that people are not necessarily commuting like they were. That is why it is important to look at our local roads and how we are going to bust that local congestion. I also just want to follow on from what the member for Tarneit said – a little observation made at the fire brigade the other night. We have one of those road traffic safety cameras that can monitor if you are on your phone. A few people had noticed it and said, 'It prompted me to change what I was doing. I wasn't picking up my phone while I was driving.' So it is an excellent thing, and I look forward to seeing more of them.

### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users*

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (10:37): I rise to speak on the committee report from the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. The Greens have consistently advocated for more funding for separated bike lanes and safer footpaths and pedestrian crossings. These changes transform our cities and our neighbourhoods, they make everyone safer and healthier, and they are better for the planet. So it is frustrating to see yet another report showing that the Victorian state government needs to do so much more to transition away from a sluggish, congested, dangerous, polluting transport system to one that is healthy, clean and efficient.

It comes as no surprise that the committee found that the absence of, or poorly designed, active transport infrastructure clearly and significantly raises the risk of injuries among pedestrians and cyclists on our roads. It recommends prioritising the safety of vulnerable road users in the way that we design our roads and urban infrastructure, like with separated bike lanes. These are not new findings,

but for too long the Victorian Labor government has underinvested in making active transport safer and more accessible.

For years in my electorate the City of Yarra has been calling for state funding to fund installing protected bike lanes that are part of both the state transport strategy and the council's action plan, but it has only been drip-fed funding here and there. We need protected bike lanes on Baker Street, on Coppin Street, on Church Street, on Johnson Street and on Wellington Street, just to name a few spots. More than two-thirds of people in Victoria want to ride and walk more. They would if there was better infrastructure to make it safer, yet there is still no action plan to deliver the *Victorian Cycling Strategy*. In fact Victoria does not have enough safe bike lanes. The report states:

Traditional road culture and design in Victoria has prioritised the convenience of drivers and motorised vehicles over vulnerable road users, placing the latter at greater risk.

Higher speed limits also place vulnerable road users at risk. The committee found that the existing process for local governments to lower speed limits to 30 kilometres an hour on council-managed roads is challenging, time consuming and restricted to government-approved trials. In my electorate in Richmond the Yarra council first instituted a 30-kilometre trial zone back in 2018. I live in the middle of it, and it is great. It was then extended in 2024 because the evidence shows that safer speeds save lives, but extending the 30-k zone took the council years and years of advocacy and negotiations with the state government to permit them to change laws on local roads. Why do councils have to jump through these bureaucratic state government hoops just to make simple changes like speed reductions, filtering and bike lanes? Statistics from Victoria's Transport Accident Commission show that 45 per cent of road user deaths in 2024 were vulnerable road users, and my electorate saw over 10 deaths in the period. Six of them were pedestrians.

The truth is that this government has simply not invested enough in the relatively inexpensive infrastructure of separated bike lanes at the levels required to make vulnerable road users less vulnerable, and where it has, that rollout tends to be piecemeal, leaving people vulnerable for at least part of their trip. And it is not like public transport fills the gap, because right across the state people who use wheelchairs or have limited mobility or push prams cannot get on many of our trains and trams. Despite activism for over 40 years from the disability community and their allies, the Victorian Labor government is still decades off making our public transport accessible and has missed its own legislated deadline to make tram stops fully accessible by 2022.

Our streets are for everyone and should work for everyone who uses them. I thank the committee for this report and for its focus on improving active and public transport for everyone. I look forward to the government rolling out its recommendations.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:41): I move:

That the consideration of government business, notice of motion 1, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Bills*

#### **Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024**

#### *Council's amendments*

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

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 14 insert –  
“(ia) amend certain definitions; and”.

2. Clause 2, lines 17 and 18, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
  - “(1) This Act (other than section 54A) comes into operation on the day after the day on which it receives the Royal Assent.
  - (2) Subject to subsection (3), section 54A comes into operation on a day or days to be proclaimed.
  - (3) If section 54A does not come into operation before 31 December 2025, it comes into operation on that day.”.
3. Insert the following New Clause before clause 55 –

**‘54A Definitions**

  - (1) In section 3(1) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990**, in the definition of *controlled weapon*, the example at the foot of paragraph (a) is **repealed**.
  - (2) In section 3(1) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990**, in the definition of *prohibited weapon*, after “imitation firearm” insert “, a machete”.
4. Clause 55, lines 10 to 33, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
  - (i) more than one incident of violence or disorder has occurred in that area in the previous 12 months that involved the use of weapons; and
  - (ii) there is a likelihood that the violence or disorder will recur; or
  - (b) the Chief Commissioner is satisfied that –
    - (i) more than one incident of violence or disorder has occurred in that area in the previous 12 months that involved the use of weapons; and
    - (ii) it is necessary to designate the area for the purpose of enabling police officers or protective services officers to exercise search powers to prevent or deter the occurrence of any violence or disorder that the Chief Commissioner is satisfied is likely to occur; or
  - (c) the Chief Commissioner is satisfied that –
    - (i) an event is to be held in that area and incidents of violence or disorder involving the use of weapons have occurred at previous occasions of that event (wherever occurring); and
    - (ii) there is a likelihood that the violence or disorder will recur; or
  - (d) the Chief Commissioner is satisfied that –
    - (i) an event is to be held in that area; and
    - (ii) by information known to the Chief Commissioner, there is a likelihood that violence or disorder involving the use of weapons will occur in that area during the period of intended operation of the declaration.”.
5. Clause 55, page 33, lines 1 to 3, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
6. Clause 55, page 33, lines 6 and 7, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
  - ‘(3) For section 10D(3)(b) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990** substitute –
    - “(b) in the case of a declaration –
      - (i) under subsection (1)(a), must not exceed 24 hours; or
      - (ii) under subsection (1)(b), must not exceed 6 months.”.
7. Clause 55, page 34, lines 4 and 5, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
  - ‘(10) For section 10D(10) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990** substitute –
    - “(10)A declaration under this section is not a legislative instrument within the meaning of the **Subordinate Legislation Act 1994**.”.
8. Clause 56, line 7, before “In” insert “(1)”.
9. Clause 56, after line 8 insert –
  - ‘(2) After section 10E(7) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990** insert –
    - “(8) A declaration under this section is not a legislative instrument within the meaning of the **Subordinate Legislation Act 1994**.”.
10. Clause 58, lines 3 and 4, omit “the first anniversary of its commencement” and insert “31 December 2026”.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:42): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

In speaking to those amendments I just want to make a couple of key points. We saw a record number of knives seized from Victorian streets in 2024 – almost 15,000. We know that more must be done to keep people safe, and that is why the Control of Weapons Act 1990 will be amended. The house amendments that have come back to the Assembly relate very clearly to the work that the government and the Parliament seek to do to amend and prohibit the sale and possession of machetes. In those house amendments that have returned to the Assembly from the Council I would like to acknowledge the work of Mr Erdogan, my ministerial colleague in the other place, for his stewardship of that work but also the consideration by members in the other place in making sure that machetes will be classified as prohibited weapons from 1 September this year.

To get those weapons off the street safely an amnesty is required, and that is to run from 1 September to 30 November this year. During that time people can obviously safely dispose of their edged weapons, those machetes, without committing a crime. If we were to have that prohibition in place immediately, we would be criminalising what is legitimate behaviour for someone to possess those items. We need to provide a safe and reliable way to be able to record how many are returned in the amnesty and where they are returned. We do not want people just throwing them in the bin, we want this to be managed appropriately. If you have got what is currently a controlled weapon but is becoming a prohibited weapon, we want it safely disposed of. We do not want people just wandering into police stations with these edged weapons; that is not going to go very well. You have got victims in police stations; you do not want to traumatise people. We have got other offenders in police stations; we have police members. We also do not need people perhaps turning up at the same time with edged weapons at those locations; it does not go very well. These things need to be ordered, they need to be managed, they need to be done safely and they need to be done in compliance with the law. We have talked about making sure that we have appropriate steel bins for people to be able to return these items. That is most likely at 24-hour police stations because of the security and the bollards in particular places and they are safe environments for people to go about that work effectively.

Prohibited weapons of course are the most strictly regulated in Victoria. They are not controlled weapons, they are banned weapons. Penalties of up to two years of imprisonment and fines of over \$47,000 for being caught in possession will also apply. We also need to be mindful that if you currently have an edged weapon like a machete, unless you have a demonstrable and legitimate use for it, you will be charged and you will be arrested. Be under no illusion: some of the behaviour that we have seen, whether in Lyndhurst recently across the weekend or in other locations, is illegal criminal activity, and police can act right now to charge you, arrest you and bring you before the courts. What we are doing here with regard to the prohibition is sending a very clear message to the community at large that these are not acceptable items to have in the community. There will be an exemption process applied, but that will be strictly limited and enforced.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank retail organisations in our community who have backed our work to write to the federal government about actions on machete imports at the border and exploring a national ban on machetes, whether it is Coles, Kmart, Target and others, just to name some. Bunnings, for example, already removed some years ago machetes from sale in their stores. I want to thank some of those other retail organisations that have flagged their desire to have further discussions with me –

**A member** interjected.

**Anthony CARBINES:** correct, Anaconda and others – and the government about how we can work on a national level, as these are national retailers, to bring this ban, this prohibition, into force more broadly across jurisdictions. I think that is a great initiative. I welcome their desire to be proactive and engage in this. I think they see the social licence here that is important for them in the work that

they do. They want to work with government, and I think they see the opportunity where our Parliament is taking a lead on this work.

Remember these are not prohibited weapons anywhere else in Australia. This is a national first, so it also has to be done without much precedent on which to work. The UK have managed to ban these items, but it took some 18 months of work to do that. We are doing this in six, and I think that that is a demonstration of our desire to do it quickly and effectively but also works on the fact that being prohibited in the six-month period means that unless you are actually conveying such an edged weapon to a bin at an amnesty location you will be charged for breaking the law, because it will be prohibited. Also the use that we have seen in the community is already criminal. In many instances what we have seen is unacceptable behaviour, and the police can act right now to deal with that behaviour.

I look forward to continuing not only the further work to roll this out through the Department of Justice and Community Safety – and I want to thank those in the department for their swift and nimble work to bring the amnesty process into effect, which they will do in consultation with Victoria Police – but also the work that will be done with our national retail groups and also the SDA, who represent so many workers who have faced these threats in the places where they work daily. On many occasions – and I know some of my colleagues will go to these matters – we find in criminal proceedings people have made a purchase of such edged weapons and then committed offences within a very short space of time, either within hours or immediately. On some of those occasions those who have been affected, those who have been victims, have been retail workers and retail staff. It is dreadful and appalling.

We do know that edged weapons are in the drawers of kitchens right across Victoria and Australia and the world, so there are challenges. But I welcome the fact that our retailers on a national basis want to work with the Parliament and the government on how we can go further around dealing with importation, removing items and stock from shelves – which can be done on a voluntary basis by many of these retailers, and they are choosing to do so – but also working with us on how that ban applies and that work applies across jurisdictions. With the Police Ministers Council – we have not had a PMC, obviously, with an imminent federal election; one will be scheduled I suspect post that time – this is another element that we will be able to bring as a policy decision to the federal Attorney-General, who chairs that group.

It is an opportunity I think for those national retailers to have their say as well and bring together a pitch and a policy paper that goes to how we get this work done, how we can engage national retailers in that work but also the representatives of workers in our retail sector to make sure that they are respected and treated safely and well. They have experience and understanding of how these items are sold, how they are displayed and whether we need to do more to perhaps remove them from sale and make it a little bit harder in terms of glass cabinets and the like to try to break that cycle of not just the criminality but sometimes the impulse purchases we have seen that lead to tragedy. There is some work there that I think is calling on both the SDA and our retail workers to understand their lived experience, how that can inform some further policy developments and the great work that our retailers do in providing services and jobs in our community but also their desire to pick up on the social licence that is so critical to their work. I think that, rather than pushback, we are seeing a desire for them to get in and support what is nation-leading prohibition, which is not simple; it is complex.

I am grateful to the Parliament and certainly to those opposite for exploring these issues and debating and discussing them across here and the other place. We will get this done. It will be effective. It will give the community confidence. It backs in the requests of Victoria Police. It provides a further platform for work with national retailers and the workers who do such a great job in our community providing services to people but also making sure that they are protected and that their voices are heard in the further work that we can do in relation to these matters.

I will leave my comments there. The house amendments are supported, and I look forward to their swift passage in this place and the contributions from members. While it does not go directly to these particular house amendments, the broader work in relation to the Terrorism (Community Protection)

and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024 on the designated areas and their expansion to up to six months for police to be able to stop and search those without a warrant for weapons I think is also about sending a very clear message that the community will be kept safe by Victoria Police. We want to get more of these weapons off our streets, because it is not just about keeping the community safe. Some young people in particular choose to carry these weapons, and we actually want police to find those before they do something stupid, before they do something that changes their life forever.

I think that is an element that is often missed in the discussions here – the interventions and the prevention work that police can do in this instance. Drop the knife and save a life, yes, but it can also change lives. We want to change lives for the better, particularly for young people that for one reason or another may think that carrying such edged weapons is to their advantage or will keep them safe. We know that it all ends in tragedy, and I would much rather that police were able to intervene and send that message to the community that train stations, shopping centres and wherever else that communities gather are safe places to do that. Hopefully the intervention by Victoria Police in those instances can save many young people from making mistakes from which they can never really recover. I commend the house amendments and wish them a speedy passage.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (10:53): I rise to make a contribution on the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024, specifically the ban on machetes. I am glad that the government has finally come to the party and banned these dangerous weapons. There was a call 477 days ago from the now Leader of the Opposition, the member for Berwick, who was the shadow minister, to have these dangerous weapons banned. Just think how many of these weapons would be out of the community, out of dangerous criminals hands in that time, and how many crimes could have been avoided, how many home invasions could have been avoided, how many instances of somebody standing over the bed of a young person with a dangerous weapon in their hands could have been avoided in those 477 days. I am glad that finally they have come to the party, but it is too little too late.

One of the key elements of this is there are still elements of this bill that have been rushed. The detail has not been worked out, and also the only date in this bill is 31 December, which potentially is the date when these machetes will be banned. That means we could be faced with another 288 days of machetes. If you just think about that for a minute, we have had 14,797 knives, swords, daggers and machetes seized in 2024. That is 14,797. That equates to 40 weapons a day – 40 of these knives a day. If you take the 288 days by the 40 weapons, that is 11,520 of these knives that could still be in the community. They are not necessarily all machetes, but that is a huge amount of knives that could potentially be available because they are not being banned now.

I understand, and the minister has said, we need time. We need time to put the amnesty in place. We need time for those carrying a machete to be able to drop it off at their local police station. Even that has not been worked out properly. I am sorry that I do not have amendments to put forward today, because this whole bill has been so rushed. We only got briefed about it 24 hours ago. It went into the Parliament's upper house last night. The debate concluded at 10 o'clock last night, so there was no time for us to be able to prepare my amendments to come through today. We have to do that last minute because the government has done everything last minute. This is a last-minute bill, and my biggest concern is that the government will not get this right. My biggest fear is that the government will not get this right.

When the Minister for Corrections was asked about details of this bill in the upper house last night, they were so not across the detail it was not funny, starting with the definition of a machete, a basic 'What's the definition of a machete?' This government had '20 centimetres and above'. The definition, according to the dictionary and everywhere else you look, is 30 centimetres. Somehow the government has pulled the definition forward to 20 centimetres. So what is it? Is it a 20-centimetre knife? Is it a 30-centimetre knife? And do you know what the answer is? We will work it out as we go through the detail later. So we are going to ban these things, but we do not even know what we are banning. Seriously, we do not even know what a machete is. This is a government that does not know what a

machete is. At least we would have tried to have this done, and we had four attempts. We had a very simple private members bill. On 28 November 2023 we introduced a private members bill to amend the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to classify machetes as a prohibited weapon. The proposal sought to ban the possession of machetes without a lawful excuse. Labor opposed the bill. On 22 February 2024 we moved an amendment to the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024, and this change would have imposed stricter regulations on their sale and possession. Labor opposed our amendments. On 21 March 2024 we moved an amendment to the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill. This change would impose stricter regulations on the sale and possession. Guess what, Labor opposed the amendment. And on 4 March we moved an amendment to the government's legislation, which is what I did here in this chamber, to give us the opportunity only a few weeks ago to incorporate a ban on machetes. They had their opportunity two weeks ago, and guess what Labor did: Labor opposed the amendment. That is four times.

Even if you thought that Labor do not want to copy our homework and they want to do their own, that is great, let them do it. But I will tell you what, I am really concerned about the homework that they have done. I am really concerned about the detail or the lack of it. We do not know what the definition is. We do not know what the exclusions are, as to where some people can be exempted and actually still be able to possess a machete. In the briefing we were told that there would be blanket exemptions and specific exemptions. There would be blanket exemptions, say, for the farming community that would be using them to cut off broccoli and cauliflower. They would not need a specific exemption – absolutely fair and reasonable. When asked in the upper house about these details, all of a sudden we start to get, 'No, each of these farmers would need a specific permit.' 'Is it a paper permit?' 'Yes, they'll probably need a paper permit, and then that might go to Service Victoria and it will be an electronic permit.' Seriously?

And how much is this going to cost? Who knows how much this is going to cost? We are going to have so much regulation. The retailer has to actually go through all of this process and then work out, 'Are you a farmer? Okay. What sort of farmer are you – cauliflower or broccoli? Or maybe you're a cattle farmer. You shouldn't have a machete.' So how are they working this out? The minister today said they need until September, if you believe them that it is going to happen in September. They need at least until September. We reckon it will be until December, because they have not got across the detail. But let us believe the minister for a minute that it will be September. They need until September to work out the detail. Our proposed amendments bringing it forward three months will mean that people will be illegally walking them into cop shops and all the rest of it, and we need these bins to be in place. The bins are going to be in place for two months. For two months, we were told last night, we are going to have these bins, and you can drop off a machete at your local cop shop. What happens after two months? What happens after the end of October? If you walk into a cop shop, like I was told by the Police Association Victoria, with a machete in your hand, the chances are you will be shot, because especially at the moment you do not walk into a police station with a machete. A lot of people do not necessarily know that you have to wrap it up and all the details and things.

**Belinda Wilson** interjected.

**David SOUTHWICK:** They will not know. The member for Narre Warren North interjects by saying they will know. Well, clearly people will not know, because the government have said that they are going to spend a whole lot of money advertising, promoting. That is part of the awareness campaign, member for Narre Warren North. The problem is, member for Narre Warren North, there is no money allocated to the campaign, so that is another idea without detail. No wonder we are broke, member for Narre Warren North, because there is no detail in any of this or in anything this government does.

Let us just not worry about the government and let us not just worry about the opposition. We have had a serious story break today on the front page of the *Herald Sun* about a corruption bombshell. What this detail says to us is that the former police commissioner and the assistant commissioner had warned the government about bail and warned the government about weapons and the need to have

controlled weapons out of the community full stop, and warned them several times, and the government ignored police advice. They not only ignored it but sacked the police commissioner and sacked the deputy police commissioner. Seriously? You provide frank and fearless advice to the government and you get sacked. And not only that, the community are left in danger because these machetes are still on the shelf. Let us just read what was said in today's *Herald Sun* about this story:

Mr Paterson ...

former deputy commissioner –

further details how he believes he and Mr Patton were targeted by the government because they railed against its soft stance on several law-and-order issues such as the decriminalisation of public drunkenness, the increased minimum age of criminal responsibility –

get this one, everybody; are you ready for it –

... a lack of weapons control –

want me to repeat it –

... a lack of weapons control, bail laws and pill testing.

**Belinda Wilson:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, I ask the member to come back to the bill.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Without assistance, member for Brighton. I think the member had strayed somewhat from the amendments.

**David SOUTHWICK:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, what I am referring to are the details released today by the deputy commissioner that suggest that these machetes should have been removed immediately and the government has failed to listen to them. So it is all about the timing. Our amendment today is about the timing, so it is relevant.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I ask the member to keep his debate relevant to the amendments on the machetes.

**David SOUTHWICK:** This is all about timing, and unfortunately, because of the lack of planning from this government, we have not been able to get our amendments before the chamber today, and I would ask you to give me some grace, because the amendments are about bringing the ban forward, as we did in the upper house. That is what we are proposing in terms of what we are trying to do. That is what the former deputy police commissioner had also suggested before he was sacked by the government, and all I am suggesting today is that this government is full of corruption and cover-up and is not listening to police.

This is very important because these laws and these changes all should be done not by governments deciding what is important and what is not but by the experts. We just had the Minister for Police on his feet suggesting that this is very important advice that they have been given from Victoria Police. My proposal is the advice was given years ago, and it has not happened in the last few months but has been ignored by the government. These bans should have taken place at least 477 days ago. The fact that they were not put in place 477 days ago has put the community at risk, and every single time that we have seen knife crime, machetes, it is on the government's head because the government has failed. They have failed to keep the community safe, and that is what has happened here. That is why we see today this corruption bombshell, because this government has absolutely interfered with police work and in this particular instance has ignored the advice of Victoria Police when they had said right up-front that these should have been banned a long time ago. Can I say that we need to get on with this now. There is no excuse but to get on with this now.

The government will argue in their debates that retailers need time to work it out and so they want to give them till September to keep selling these machetes. It is true that the government have no idea what exemptions they are going to have to allow them legally to be sold to farmers and to other people; we do not know that. But I think at the moment, because these weapons are so dangerous, as the government have alluded to, it means that they should not be sold tomorrow. As soon as we get royal assent, take them off the shelf. Let the government work out the details of where the exemptions are and then bring them back in a safe way, behind glass with a permit, with the things that are needed. That would be the simple solution. But instead this government is green-lighting the sale of machetes to anybody until what could possibly be 31 December, and we think that is reckless.

We think if the government were really serious about this they would instruct by royal assent to ensure that machetes are removed from the shelves immediately. If this was a dangerous good that was on a shelf, any other product on the shelf, you would have a product recall immediately. You would not wait another 280 days; you would do it immediately. This government is saying, 'You know what, they're actually not that unsafe. They're not such a dangerous weapon. So you know what, sell them for another 288 days and then we'll deal with it.' Well, you know what, it is green-lighting crooks to buy up. That is what it is. It is green-lighting the crooks to say, 'You know what, how many can we buy? Let's stockpile machetes, because there's no rules here; there's no rules until they finally come into play.' This government is not serious about it. If they were serious about it, they would follow our amendment that the member for Brighton is going to put forward because I have not had the opportunity to put the amendment forward today. The amendment will say that at royal assent, when we vote on the bill, these machetes, these dangerous weapons, will be taken off the shelf.

Every day in the 288 days that they continue to be sold under Labor, that will be a fail. All of the government members can stand up today and pat themselves on the back, but they will all know that these dangerous machetes will continue to be sold until the government finally work out what they are doing. And if you trust them to work anything out, good luck to you. They could not organise a chook raffle. If you reckon this government is going to be able to figure this one out, good luck to you. There is no definition of what a machete is. There is no idea about what the exemptions are with all of this. There has not been a proper consultation. They have had so long to work this out, two months for the bins and no idea about what happens after the amnesty. Seriously, there are so many other ways to do this in a safer way, but the government has said, 'You know what, we'll just put this bill in, we'll send out a press release and everyone will be really happy that we've done it.' But the devil in the detail will be worked out later.

If you trust this government with an open chequebook, then good luck to you. Good luck to you if you want to trust the Allan government with an open chequebook, because everything they have touched has been a complete disaster. We do have a crime crisis here in Victoria because of these dangerous machetes.

**Sarah Connolly:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Caulfield has strayed so far from this bill I do have to wonder if he has even read it. Can you please bring him back to the bill and the debate before the house.

**David SOUTHWICK:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I would have hoped that the member for Laverton, in her electorate, where –

**Sarah Connolly** interjected.

**David SOUTHWICK:** I absolutely know where Laverton is – a lot of her community are crying out for an immediate ban, would want to be able to support this now. Her frivolous point of order shows that she does not care about removing dangerous machetes and she does not care about her community in Laverton.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant):** Member for Caulfield, I will rule on the point of order. The debate is on the amendments, on the machetes, so I ask you to keep to that part of the bill.

**David SOUTHWICK:** Absolutely. It is really important in the area of Laverton, where I spent a lot of my childhood growing up, as the member for Laverton knows. It is an area where we know many of the community have said the member for Laverton has let them down, because this ban on dangerous machetes should have been done a long time ago. The member for Laverton can walk out of the chamber now and turn her back on her constituents of Laverton, but the hardworking people of Laverton want a member that is going to stand up against crime.

This government is a Johnny-come-lately to the party, saying, 'You know what, all of a sudden we care about law and order.' What did the government do about banning these machetes in the 477 days that they could have done it? Nothing, zero. What have they done about the bail laws? Nothing. What have they done about the crime crisis? Nothing. All of a sudden Premier Allan and the government want to have Victorians believe that they are going to be tough on crime. Well, we know that is absolute bonkers. No-one believes it. This government today have completely missed an opportunity, because what they could have done very, very simply is say, 'You know what, let's get them off the shelves straightaway.' Just like with any other product recall of a bad product, a dangerous weapon, remove it tomorrow. Do not remove it in three months, eight months or nine months. The bill detail says that this bill will come into play on 31 December, 288 days away. We are all hoping and praying for a sooner date.

Tell that to the victims. Tell that to the families who had a horrible home invasion in the middle of the night. Tell them story after story of how we had a teen attacked in St Kilda with a machete; a woman's hand was slashed in a random machete attack at a car wash; a pair of individuals were arrested after a violent crime spree, including attacks on elderly people, with a machete; two individuals were arrested after they approached a man, threatened him with machetes and stole his vehicle; a 24-year-old was killed in a vicious machete attack in Lyndhurst, stabbed to death after a fight broke out in a shopping centre – the 10 assailants were still on the run as of 17 March; and a 25-year-old rideshare driver and international student was left with maimed fingers after a group of armed men forced their way into his car, beating and stabbing him. That was reported on 14 March. This is only in the last month. These were dangerous crime attacks with a weapon, a machete, in the last month.

I plead with the chamber: why not take them off the shelf tomorrow? Seriously, what are you waiting for? Are you waiting for another attack? Are you going to explain to the victim, somebody who is targeted by another knife attack, that 'You know what, we just couldn't get it right. We thought it was important to ban them, but it wasn't really important to ban them.' There is no middle ground here. It is very simple: a bad product, a dangerous product, needs to be recalled tomorrow and needs to be taken off the shelves tomorrow. It can be taken off the shelves easily tomorrow or at the time of royal assent, like any other product that needs to be recalled. The government might argue: what about those people that do need them and what about the farmers and what about others that will have the exemption? Once the government finally work out the details of the exemption – and let us give them as much time as they like – then they can work with retailers to bring them back in a safe way with the permits, with whatever is needed in a safe environment. Isn't that simple? Doesn't that make sense? Isn't it logical to do it that way? I sincerely plead with the government to take them off the shelves. Do not allow them to continue to be sold on the shelves. Do not allow those people to buy them at a market or buy them at a Bunnings.

Again, the member for Laverton was trivialising it before. They were available freely at the Laverton Market as of last week. The Laverton Market had them freely available. A 14-year-old-boy went and bought a machete for his brother as a birthday present only a few weeks ago at the Laverton Market. The member for Laverton wanted to take points of order on me and wanted to trivialise this whole thing. That is just a disgrace. The member for Laverton should be ashamed of herself, because she knows that this should happen tomorrow.

*Members interjecting.*

**David SOUTHWICK:** The member for Laverton can laugh about it, but the member for Laverton needs to explain to those families that have these weapons available in the market now.

**Luba Grigorovitch:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, let us get back to the bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant):** It was part of the debate. The member for Caulfield will come back to the amendment.

**David SOUTHWICK:** I think every second word was ‘machetes’. I do not know whether I can be any more relevant than mention the word ‘machete’. I know the definition of ‘machete’ has not been worked out, but I will still try and do my best to make it all about machetes because that is what it is and that is what we are talking about.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant):** Member for Caulfield, can I just rule on the point of order. There is no point of order. Continue and come back to the bill.

**David SOUTHWICK:** There is no point of order – exactly. What we need to understand is we need to get rid of these machetes tomorrow. The member for Kororoit should know that these are really important. I would hope the member for Kororoit will get on with the bill, because I know even in Prahran, where the member for Kororoit lives, we have had dangerous machete attacks.

**Luba Grigorovitch:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it seems the member on his feet is obsessed with some of the members on this side, but if he could get back to the amendment.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant):** There is no point of order. It is part of the debate.

**David SOUTHWICK:** It is really disappointing for the government to laugh and to try and bring trivial points of order on something that is as important as a machete ban. The member for Kororoit can laugh and the member for Laverton can laugh and the member for Narre Warren North can laugh and interject. I would think that the government would get on board and support this. As I have said, these machetes are being sold at the Laverton Market today. I ask: would the member for Laverton be happy that these machetes are going to continue to be sold at the Laverton Market for three months, four months, five months, 288 days? Is that something that the member for Laverton would be happy with the Laverton Market retailers doing? I just put that out there, because once this bill is gazetted, the machetes will still be sold at the Laverton Market potentially for another 288 days, at least until the end of September. If you take the government at face value, the machetes will be available at Laverton Market until the end of September. The member for Laverton can laugh, but I pray that none of those machetes are purchased at the Laverton Market and used on a victim. I pray that that does not happen, and I hope you do too, member for Laverton; I really do. That is why the member for Brighton will move amendments today to ban the sale of these immediately.

**Belinda Wilson** interjected.

**David SOUTHWICK:** I take up the interjection from the member for Narre Warren North to just explain to everybody listening to this debate so they understand that this was rushed in so much at the last minute that not only did we not have an opportunity for a proper briefing but the details were lacking as we saw in the upper house last night when they could not define what a machete was, when they could not define what the designated exemptions would be. They had no idea about any of the detail: a 20-centimetre weapon, a 30-centimetre weapon – none of this was worked out. But also the debate finished after 10 o’clock last night, and by the time we tried to bring the amendments in first thing this morning it was too late. The whole thing has been rushed through.

We want the ban now. We want it now. The government need to work it out and make sure Victorians are kept safe. That is what we want them to do. We want the detail to be worked out. As we heard, members in the upper house asked whether the government had consulted with the Victorian Farmers Federation and with other farmers. The response from the minister was, ‘Oh, yes. No problems. Anybody who’s a member of the VFF will be able to get some kind of exemption’ – again, not even

understanding who the VFF are. Is every farmer a member of the VFF? Seriously, where is the detail here? There will be exemptions that will need to be worked out. People do use them for work purposes, and they do need to be sold in a proper, safe manner. We are not arguing about any of this. But I finish where I started: this ban should have been done 477 days ago. The now Leader of the Opposition has made it his absolute passion to get this happening, and I absolutely credit the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Berwick, for what he has done in driving this ban.

We have had every single Labor member vote against the ban four times. Every single Labor member has voted against the ban four times in 477 days. So we know that this is a Johnny-come-lately. This is a government that has had a revelation that it is going to do it. But we all know why the revelation has come. It has come because of the corruption bombshell of the Allan Labor government interfering with Victoria Police, not listening to advice from Victoria Police, not listening to the public and ultimately not listening to their own constituents, who are haunted every single day by a crime crisis, every single day by a home invasion in their electorate or somewhere nearby, every single day by a car theft and every single day by a knife crime.

As I said when I started, 40 knives are confiscated each and every day in Victoria. In another 288 days, in the time that this government delays banning the machete, we will still have 11,520 knives in the community. Is that something this government want on their heads? I would say no. Get behind us and ban the machetes today.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (11:23): I do hope that the member for Caulfield stays in the chamber for this contribution, particularly after thinking or misjudging that I would not be making a contribution on crime seeing as I have spoken on every bill on crime in this house since we introduced bills on crime into this house each and every single week to reform legislation that is helping to keep our communities safe and making them safer. If you listen to the member for Caulfield, you would think his entire life is in a state of crisis. But I would say to those opposite that the only thing that is in crisis is the Leader of the Opposition's leadership when he has misled the community about the local cruise he took in Queensland.

**David Southwick**: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, as we know, this is a very serious bill, and the member is completely straying from the bill. She only has 9 minutes to talk about the bill. I suggest she focuses on her government and not the opposition.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant)**: I remind the member to come back to the amendments to the bill.

**Sarah CONNOLLY**: I was just reflecting on the member for Caulfield's state of mind and feeling that his life is in a state of crisis at the moment, but I will come back to the bill. I am really keen to stand here and speak once again on the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024. These amendments that we are passing here today deliver stronger protections for community safety, and they give effect to our government's planned machete ban. Just last sitting week I was in this place debating legislation, and I am proud to do it again and again and again, because I know and my community knows – including Laverton, member for Caulfield – that these kinds of changes are so important for local communities like mine that are sadly experiencing this kind of violent crime. Just yesterday we debated here in this place our government's Bail Amendment (Tough Bail) Bill 2025, which sets Victoria up as having one of the toughest bail laws in the country and clamps down on some of the most serious violent offences that we have seen over the past couple of months. It should be very clear to Victorians watching this that when it comes to community safety we are committed and we are locked into it. There are big steps to take and not ones I imagine are taken lightly.

In 2024 alone police seized 14,797 knives, swords, daggers and machetes, and this is more than any time over the past 10 years. This amounts to about 40 blades each and every single day. It is pretty shocking. Having said this, I want to acknowledge the incredible work of Victoria Police, particularly

in my local community, in getting these bladed weapons out of the community, which is the flip side of this statistic. There is, however, clearly much more to do, which is why the Premier has announced that this bill will be taking this further by introducing and facilitating a ban on machetes here in Victoria. This is the first ban of this kind here in Australia, and we have made this decision upon consultation with Victoria Police.

**A member** interjected.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** Yes, we consult with Victoria Police on this side of the house, and we have also been learning from the United Kingdom in fact, which recently implemented a similar ban. Over in the UK they did theirs in about 18 months. We are doing it in a third of that time. I know many in my community welcome this ban with open arms, and I have also heard many ask why this cannot be achieved tomorrow. I am going to answer this one, particularly for the member for Caulfield so that his life is a little bit less in a crisis and he is a little less hysterical than he has been in the chamber this morning. The answer is there is a lot more to do before the ban comes into effect on 1 September. There is an amnesty program that has to be set up to allow for people to do the right thing and surrender their machetes. The ban will make machetes a prohibited weapon, which means possessing one will be a serious offence punishable by up to two years imprisonment or a fine of over \$47,000. These are serious punishments, so we want people to do the right thing. We are giving them the chance to do the right thing and give up their machetes, including those that are currently held lawfully. I do not have one at home, but there are people that do have machetes lawfully – we know that – and they need to have an opportunity to give them up.

To the people who have said to me that we should have done this a year ago, including those opposite – and the member for Caulfield, I might add – I do want to remind them all that back in 2023 we clarified that the machete was a controlled weapon, which means that even now, under our current laws, you cannot carry a machete without a lawful excuse. This clarification prevented and punished the sale of machetes to minors, to the 14-year-olds that the member for Caulfield thinks are shopping at Laverton Market. The unfortunate inconvenience for those opposite is that some people do own one for legitimate uses, and that includes things like gardening, farming or outdoor recreation pursuits. This ban is going to mean that those people who have done nothing wrong and have committed no crime will be required to surrender their machetes.

Not only that, but we have to ensure that this is done safely. We have listened to the advice of Victoria Police in how to do this right, and they have told us it would not be safe for machetes to be returned directly to police stations. This is the same position they took over 25 years ago when we had the national firearms amnesty and Australians gave up their guns in droves. I think the community can understand that when it comes to police stations, places that need to be secure, having a stockpile of dangerous weapons around them is probably not the best or the smartest idea. We want Victoria Police to keep doing the important work of keeping our community safe and keep out on the beat, which is why the amnesty scheme will be developed over the coming months to identify sites for disposal and work with retailers who legally sell machetes to understand their new obligations under the law and potentially cancel any orders of new machetes. We are also going to use the existing Governor in Council exemption process to apply to machetes with this ban, and the work is currently ongoing, with consultation with relevant industries and collector groups to ensure that, where necessary, exemptions can be applied.

I think these changes get the balance right. There are indeed many legitimate uses for machetes, and we have our Landcare Victoria crew visiting Parliament this week. I am sure that those groups would in fact, depending on where they are located, have machetes for the different work that they are doing in Landcare. It is these kinds of people that we need to help educate. They want to do the right thing, they need to do the right thing, and we need to help them work out what they are going to be doing. These changes are getting the balance right. While there are many legitimate uses for machetes, the fact is that the flow of them into Victoria means that many of them have unfortunately still ended up in the hands of people – and yes, young people – who have used them to commit horrendous crimes.

I spoke yesterday about some of the criminal incidents in my electorate involving machete crime, and I do not talk about them lightly. I hope that this ban will see them taken out of circulation on the streets and that will lead to a drop in this kind of horrendous, appalling activity.

The other part of the amendments that will be brought with this bill deals with the new search and seizure powers that police will have for designated areas. I know that was very much welcome in my community. I think it is excellent that it has been expanded. The bill initially gave Victoria Police the power to declare areas where they can conduct weapons searches and seizures without a warrant for a period of up to 12 hours. The amendments we have introduced will extend this to a period of up to six months. It is all about keeping folks in our local streets and neighbourhoods and at big community events safe and indeed safer, including hotspots like train stations and shopping centres. I think it is going to be a really great opportunity for police to carry out this work for longer periods of time.

This is really important stuff that we are talking about today. I hate to see to see it misused for political pointscoreing by those opposite. I wish they would just get behind these bills and vote for them. The community want these bills to pass and for us to get on and make their community safer. Instead – complete political pointscoreing again and again. For us it is nothing new; for the community it is a constant disappointment –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, this member has voted against toughening this four times. Four times – what a disgrace.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant):** Member for Brighton, you just need to keep to the point of order, or whatever it is. Member for Laverton, you have little time left.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** I do say again: the opposition should get behind these tough bail laws and this new bill before the house and let us get on and do our job and keep our communities safe.

**Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (11:34):** I rise today to speak on the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024. What we are going to see with our next speaker are some amendments, which will be put forward by the member for Brighton, which will actually make it an effective bill. Otherwise we will be deeply concerned if this does go ahead as is, because there are going to be two incredibly important amendments proposed that will strengthen what will otherwise be ineffective and long-overdue machete laws.

The amendments call for an immediate ban on the sale of machetes and bring forward the date that they are classified as a prohibited weapon. Otherwise, under Labor's weak laws, the sale and distribution of machetes will continue for another six months. That is six more months when violent criminals could walk into a store and buy a machete with no questions asked and six more months when these weapons could be stockpiled, ready to be used in terrifying home invasions, violent assaults and frightening and horrific robberies. We have seen it. We have seen it in the headlines on a daily basis.

Our amendments will stop this madness. They will restrict the sale of machetes immediately and ensure that only those with a valid exemption can access them. They will bring forward the date when machetes become a prohibited weapon by three months, making it clear that these dangerous weapons have no place on our streets. That needs to be the message. Victoria is sick of waiting. Every day that machetes remain available is another day when innocent Victorians could be attacked and are attacked. These amendments must be supported and passed by Parliament without delay. A record amount of knives were seized in Victoria last year. Nearly 15,000 knives, swords, daggers and machetes were seized last year, the most in a decade; that is 40 weapons per day.

After four attempts by the Liberals and Nationals to ban machetes, the Allan Labor government has finally bowed to pressure to introduce a ban – and I wish the member for Laverton was in here as I give a correct and true timeline of events that seem to have slipped her mind. While the member for Laverton said many in her community welcome the ban, she failed to recognise that she opposed our

changes last year and the year prior. In November 2023 we introduced a private members bill to amend the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to classify machetes as prohibited weapons. The proposal sought to ban the possession of machetes without lawful excuse, and Labor opposed the bill. In February last year an amendment was moved to the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024 in the Assembly to reclassify machetes from controlled to prohibited weapons, and this change would have imposed stricter regulations on their sale and possession. Again Labor opposed the amendment. It is insanity, and lives are at risk as a result. Suddenly there is silence when you realise the impact that you on that side have had on Victorians' lives. In March last year we moved another amendment to the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. The change would have imposed stricter regulations on their sale and possession. Again, Labor opposed the amendment. Again, in March this year – we are seeing the cycle here of protecting criminals in Victoria – we moved an amendment to the government's Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill, and the member for Caulfield's amendment aimed to classify machetes as a prohibited weapon. What happened? Labor opposed the amendment – and here we are.

It is insanity what is happening in Victoria right now. Just last week I stopped at a petrol station and was shocked to see machetes being sold on the counter. It is so normal now that you can buy a machete from your petrol station. Half of them would have been classified as machetes by this government. I asked the clerk, 'Why are they being sold so openly?' His response was chilling in its simplicity. He said, 'They're selling like hot cakes; they're selling like hot cakes in Victoria.' How can you sit in this place knowing full well the devastation these weapons can cause and allow them and vote for them to be so easily available? This is not responsible government, this is negligence.

Victorian people are paying the price for this government's negligence, with torture every night and the fear of more home invasions that you see on a daily basis in the headlines. The Allan Labor government has repeatedly failed to take decisive action when it comes to crime – any action. We have been begging for 18 months: do something. We saw it with their disastrous bail laws, we see it with the underfunding of police resources and now again we see it with the refusal of an immediate ban on machetes. In the meantime the stats speak pretty loudly: crime is surging, and regional Victorians are paying the price.

The statistics are so grim, and they are only going to get grimmer in the next six months with what you are proposing. In Mitchell shire, criminal incidents have increased by nearly 32 per cent – 850 more incidents recorded compared to last year. Total offences are up by 27 per cent throughout the region. Family violence has spiked by nearly 24 per cent. In Benalla criminal incidents have risen by more than 12 per cent. Strathbogie surged 34 per cent year on year. This is the outcome of your weak laws. These are not just numbers. It took you 18 months. There were lots of victims in that time because it took you 18 months. We see it in our offices, when they come in, that families have to live in fear while you delay accepting our amendments. These are the consequences of crime in Victoria right now. It is disgraceful. There have been reports of stolen vehicles in Violet Town, break-ins at farms near Benalla and Colbinabbin, robberies in Murchison community house and damage across so many towns. Victorians feel helpless under this government. People are posting desperately on community pages, contacting my office for answers and forming their own neighbourhood watch groups, because what other options do they have.

Instead of strengthening our justice system this government has cut funding to our courts and delayed pay negotiations for our police officers, and instead of investing in public safety the Allan Labor government closed Dhurringile Prison, a facility that underwent multimillion dollars worth of significant upgrades to improve rehabilitation efforts for low-risk offenders. Overnight it was closed. The closure of Dhurringile was reckless, and it ignored the needs of Victoria right now. More than 160 staff lost their jobs, and our region lost a key facility that could have played a role in housing offenders under these laws. If the government truly wants tougher bail laws that will put more offenders behind bars, then why on earth would it close a prison that could have helped manage that burden? Dhurringile Prison was not just a correctional facility, it was a centre for rehabilitation and,

importantly, reintegration. For many low-risk offenders it provided an opportunity to gain skills, work on farms and participate in programs that aimed to reduce reoffending. Dhurringile played a crucial role in breaking the cycle of crime and ensuring that those who serve their time can return to society as contributing members. Without proper rehabilitation the risk of reoffending remains high, placing further strain on law enforcement and the judicial system. Closing Dhurringile without a clear plan for replacing its program is a failure of long-term planning and a perfect example of this government's stupidity and negligence when it comes to controlling crime in Victoria. We must prioritise smart justice solutions that balance accountability with rehabilitation and ensure offenders who can be reformed are given the place to do so. The government must halt the sale of Dhurringile Prison immediately and work with the community to ensure the site is put to good use.

Victorians deserve a say in their future, and we need urgent leadership to address the root causes of violence in our communities. Stronger sentencing laws, better support for police and immediate restrictions on the sale of dangerous weapons are the bare minimum you should be delivering in government. This is not about politics, this is about public safety. The choice is simple: act now or explain to Victorians why the Allan Labor government let the danger continue.

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (11:44): What an hour that has been. I had to go for a walk because my ears were hurting from all the yelling and screaming. I was very pleased that the member for Brighton did not follow the member for Laverton, because I know –

**James Newbury**: I'm coming, don't worry.

**Belinda WILSON**: I know. I will be gone well and truly by then because my ears will not be able to contain it.

**James Newbury**: I won't miss you.

**Belinda WILSON**: I know you will. Everyone knows how close we are, member for Brighton. I know how much you will miss me. These amendments are going to change lives. A lot has been said on both sides, but our Premier has very honestly stood up and said we need to make changes because we have not got it right. I think that we have been honest about it. It takes a lot to do that. We are the government. We are the ones that are setting the agenda. We are the ones that are listening to our communities, and we have had to make changes. Like the member for Euroa was saying earlier, every day she is having conversations with people that are being affected by crime, and I am too. I also have family members and friends that have been affected by crime.

These changes that are going to be made in the coming months are going to make a huge difference to all of our communities. I am old and remember very clearly when we had the gun amnesty. We know what a difference that made to our country, especially when we look at other countries around the world and how their gun laws are and how they act. I believe that this machete amnesty is going to start 1 September. Somebody said end of September, but I think the goal is 1 September. It cannot happen tomorrow. There are processes that have got to be put in place. You cannot just suddenly get a wheelie bin out and say, 'Everyone pop your machetes in and off we go.' There are actually processes that go through the department. The opposition have not been in government for a very long time, so they have forgotten all of those processes they have to go through. I think that what we are putting in place is going to be life changing for everyone in this state.

We have spoken a lot about where the machetes are sold. We have all seen them in different places. I know the member for Euroa was saying a service station. I have not seen them in service stations, but I have seen them at markets a lot. I will not name the markets, but they are for sale in a lot of different places. I do not believe that people are going to be buying them up when they are going to be illegal in a few months time. Maybe that is me being a bit naive, but I think that once we have all these processes in place where these can be placed into bins safely and securely with our law enforcement, this is when we will see huge and dramatic change. Sure, we have had some suggestions of change for this earlier. We are now looking forward to these incredible changes happening in the coming months.

So what will happen? I know that the member for Euroa also spoke about how many machetes had been seized – 15,000 in 2024. Wow, that is a lot. That includes knives, swords, daggers and machetes. What is our definition of ‘machete’? That is actually not going to be in the bill, so we can all have a 30- or 20-centimetre blade, as I think we were discussing earlier. Having those off the street is going to make a very big difference to all of our communities.

Very close to my electorate last week we had a death, in Lyndhurst, which affects our whole community. It does not just affect the one area of Lyndhurst and the electorate of Carrum; it also affects all the south-east because fingers get pointed at certain cultural groups and people are scared. There are programs that we run. One of them I know – and I think the member for Mildura spoke about it yesterday – is Pivot, an incredible youth program in the south-east which works with a lot of our multicultural communities to make changes. These programs will always be a priority for us as they work with these groups of youths to help them, educate them and guide them in their lives to live and learn their best. I think that is one of the great things about that program.

I actually have a really great police team in my electorate; they are incredible. In fact we are rebuilding the Narre Warren station at the moment, but I have the good old Endeavour Hills police station – a huge shout-out to Alan Dew, who is an iconic mastermind in my electorate who everyone knows and loves. He is incredible at his job, and his station is also incredible. He has taken on a lot of extra things recently because of the renovation and the rebuild of Narre Warren. I know, after speaking to them on a weekly basis, how they feel about crime in the south-east, and the feedback they have given me has been fed back to our ministers. They realise and I know they know the difference these changes are going to make.

The two government amendments that have been agreed to in the Legislative Council are the amendment to create a long-term designated area under the Control of Weapons Act 1990 and the second amendment to reclassify machetes as a prohibited weapon under the act. As I said, we know these changes are being made after long consultation with Victoria Police. I really believe that this is also going to further strengthen the Control of Weapons Act with these amendments and help our police force in apprehending and bringing in our crime statistics and also our home invasions, which no-one wants. No-one in this state wants to have anyone be harmed or hurt, have a home invasion or be injured in any way, shape or form. I am a mum of three kids. I have got boys of a similar age to the one that passed away last week, and the thought of that family having to be told what happened is mortifyingly sad. No-one should die in that way. My heart goes out to that family and the sadness they are going through. I also had the honour of meeting some Melton residents a couple of weeks ago and meeting a father who had lost two of his boys. Pardon me for not knowing their names; I will allow the member for Melton to elaborate on that when he gives his contribution. But none of us want to see people injured or dying from the use of a machete or any type of weapon. I know as time goes on in the next few months we really are going to see a huge change to our youth statistics, which is what this is all about.

I am going to leave it there because there are a number of different speakers who are going to go after me, and I am looking forward to hearing each and every one of them from this side of the house. As I look at the member for Brighton across the other side, I will just say I am really pleased that as a government we have stood up. We have said that we needed to do better. We are doing better. On that, I commend these house amendments to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (11:53): I rise to speak on the amendments that have been moved today, and I do seek to move amendments which have just come in on behalf of the Shadow Minister for Police and Corrections, if they can be circulated in my name. I move:

1. Amendment 1 line 2, omit all words and expressions on this line and insert –  
“(ia) further provide for prohibited weapons; and”.

2. Amendment 2 lines 3 to 8, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
  - “(1) This Act (other than sections 54B and 54D) comes into operation on the day after the day on which it receives the Royal Assent.
  - (2) Subject to subsection (3), sections 54B and 54D come into operation on a day or days to be proclaimed.
  - (3) If sections 54B and 54D do not come into operation before 30 September 2025, they come into operation on that day.”.
3. Amendment 3 lines 2 to 8, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
 

**54A Definitions**

In section 3(1) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990**, in the definition of *controlled weapon*, the example at the foot of paragraph (a) is **repealed**.

**54B Definitions**

In section 3(1) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990**, in the definition of *prohibited weapon*, after “imitation firearm” **insert** “, a machete”.

**54C Prohibited weapons**

After section 5(3) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990** **insert** –

“(4) In this section (other than subsection 1A) –

*prohibited weapon* includes a machete.”.

**54D Prohibited weapons**

Section 5(4) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990** is **repealed**.’.
4. Amendment 10, omit “31 December 2026” and insert “30 September 2026”.

They relate to, as the shadow minister alluded to earlier, bringing on the ban earlier and also imposing a ban in retail immediately. I said yesterday and I say again today the job of government is to keep the community safe. What we have talked about in relation to bail yesterday and machetes today is about the community not being safe and the government proposing changes which will not make the community safer quicker, which is not only what the community want but what they deserve and what they need, and they need it now. They do not need it in 288 days, which is when these amendments will come into effect. I refer to clause 2 under the amendments – 31 December, as per those amendments.

What we do know is that on average 40 weapons were seized each and every day last year, of the 14,797. Forty weapons a day were seized – it is out of control. Forty of these weapons a day – they are everywhere. All the Premier did last week with her press conference was illustrate how many of these weapons are around and how available they are. But for the government to then stand up and say they are going to do something in 288 days – how weak, how pathetic, and Victorians know. Victorians know that the changes the government is seeking to make will not make them safer, and they also know that the changes are not quick enough. It is too little too late from this government. We have heard examples being read into *Hansard* by members on this side of the place for a very, very long time. Even this morning in this debate we heard examples of the most horrific crimes, and I refer to the shadow minister’s reference to the shocking crime in St Kilda. What will be interesting is to see whether the local member will get up on behalf of her community and speak about that crime, because we know these crimes are occurring. These amendments will bring the ban on quicker. Why would you possibly oppose them?

If you do not understand the government’s behaviour and track record on this issue, I would only look at these specific amendments just to make it clear for everyone who is not a parliamentary tragic. I assume everyone is, like me, but for everyone who is not a parliamentary tragic, the government is amending a bill and adding in machete-related changes to that bill today, when two weeks ago they opposed toughened machete provisions in this very chamber and voted against them. They voted against toughening machete laws two weeks ago in this bill, and today they are moving amendments to the same bill. You can be absolutely assured that had the government voted for the amendments

two weeks ago. We pushed for them to already be in place. They could already be in place, because two weeks ago they had the opportunity and voted no. I hear people asking, 'Did they vote no just once?' No, they did not vote no just once. 477 days ago the coalition tried to push the government to get tougher on machete and knife crime by moving a private members bill in this place, and every member, including the minister who is walking through the chamber, voted no 477 days ago. And it was not just then, not just two weeks ago, but four times the government has voted no to getting tough on knife crime, and finally the community sees it, not just because of the crimes that are occurring. They know now that the government kept voting no. They know that at the heart of this government is a belief that perpetrators come first and victims come second. The community knows that; they know it. You can hear the Labor members quietly whispering about how the government are going down the wrong path, how they have lost their way, because the community now knows crime is out of control. They know crime is out of control, and they know that not enough is being done to get tough and keep the community safe.

As I said, four attempts have been made in this place to get tougher on machete and knife crime. Why the delay, then? Why are we waiting until 31 December, you might ask. The truth is the government have not yet worked out what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. They have not even worked out what they are going to ban, and they have admitted that in the debate. They have admitted in the debate that they do not yet know exactly what they are going to ban and they do not know who they are going to allow to lawfully continue to have an instrument in certain circumstances – for example, farmers, as has been raised. The government does not know. Not only have they come 477 days after the coalition proposed it to the table, they do not know what they are doing or how they are going to do it. You only have to look at the debate today in this chamber. The minister himself said that these –

**Lily D'Ambrosio** interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** Well, I will leave that one off camera. The minister himself said today that these machetes will be handed in at 24-hour police stations. That is what the minister said. There are obviously issues in many areas because the government has allowed 24-hour police stations to be shut – 43 of them, including in my community of Bayside. We have one station, which is now shut at night. The minister himself said police stations, and members that followed from the government then said the ban would not mean handing in machetes at police stations. You have the minister saying the ban will be imposed at police stations, and then Labor members stand up and say the handovers will not occur at police stations. This government cannot even work out from one speaker to the next not only what they are banning but how. I do not begrudge the backbenchers, because they are just reading out the talking points they have been given. I get it. I am sure they ad lib between the talking points – I will give them that – but the government members read out the talking points which say machetes are not going to be handed in at police stations after the minister said they are. Which one is it? That is a very fair question. To have government members not know in this chamber this morning just shows that they do not know what they are doing.

477 days ago this government had an opportunity to get tough and do something about machete and knife crimes. We know that 40 weapons are seized every single day, so we know that since that time 19,080 weapons will have on average been seized. That is nearly 20,000 weapons, and that falls on Premier Allan's head – every single one – because the government through their leadership said no, just like they have said no four times.

The community knows that this Premier and this government are only trying to act now because they have been caught politically. They have not even drafted legislation. Their own members do not know what they are going to do about it. Their members do not even understand it. The government have been caught being soft on crime and they have been caught being soft on weapons. We have moved amendments today which will show again how soft they are. Not only should they stand condemned, but the community is condemning them every single day of the week. The government should hang their heads in shame for what they have allowed to occur in Victoria.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (12:03): I am sure the only person outside of this house that views that, the member for Brighton's mum, will give him a hug tonight, give him a bit of Bonox, some warm milk, calm him down, maybe –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, knife crimes are not a joke.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters)**: There is no point of order. The member for Frankston just commenced his comments.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: No, politicising crime is not a joke. I wonder, member for Brighton, how you feel when you say some of those things in this house – how the member for Brighton feels when he speaks mistruths in this house. You have spoken many mistruths in this house in the last few minutes.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is breaching the standing orders by suggesting that I have deliberately misled this house. That is a breach of the standing orders.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters)**: The member for Frankston to continue without impugning any other member.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: Just to clear up a couple of things, because the member for Brighton was quite confused, this bill will be proclaimed as legislation on 1 September. That is in his notes. The date that it will be proclaimed will be the day it comes into operation, which is 1 September. Like most legislation that comes before this house, there is another date which is really, let us put it into layman's terms, a backstop, and that is the date that the member for Brighton is claiming it comes into operation – 31 December. I cannot stand here and explain things like this, because the member for Brighton has been in this house a long time now and should know these things.

The other thing I picked up on just then which is really inaccurate and I think misleads the public is regarding the handing in of prohibited or illegal weapons. There already is a system in place at the moment, a well-known system, for handing in firearms where, after a certain period, if you find an illegal firearm or you are not licensed at your house – it might be from a deceased estate; it could be a war trophy that you did not know your grandparents had that came into your possession – you can, by appointment, go to your police station and hand that in. That is really important, because I do not want the Minister for Police to be misquoted. The police minister knows very well his own legislation, and what he meant when he was up here speaking was that by appointment, by the existing system for firearms, you can go in and hand in what is now a controlled weapon but will be a prohibited weapon. So let us be very clear about that.

The other item that I would like to speak on quite quickly before we let others, who have been waiting a long time, speak on this – is talking about the timing here. I spoke to my youngest son last night and said, 'How's work at Anaconda?' He said, 'Really great. I love working at Anaconda – great people, great bosses.' I said, 'Can you tell me if they're actually selling machetes now?' And I kind of had to explain what a machete was, because like many people, he did not know why you would sell a machete. He said, 'They're not on the shelves anymore.' Anaconda is a retailer, and it looks like they have taken them from the shelves and are probably going to take them from sale online as well. That follows on from another bunch of retailers that have gone down the path of making sure that they are part of the solution to this problem and they are working towards increased community safety.

For those of us in this house and for those retailers, it is a matter of knowing our part. What I would say to those opposite is: what is your part? Is the part that you play in this yelling at clouds? Is your part perpetual confusion? Because what have been put before this house – these amendments – are very, very, very specific and I think they cover exactly what they should. As far as definitions and what not go, like most pieces of legislation, there is a piece of paper in the back of that legislation or that act that is called regulations. That will explain some specifics of this legislation, just like it does in other legislation.

Much like other members of this house, I am proud that we can go to our communities and say we have listened and we will do what they want us to do. We will represent them. But this is not an issue that can be solved with a click of a finger. There are many facets in this, from community education to handing machetes in to making sure that retailers are supported and they are educated too. I commend this bill to the house.

**Jess WILSON (Kew)** (12:09): I too rise to speak on the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024 and the amendments made by the Legislative Council. Let us just focus for a moment. Only two weeks ago were we in this chamber debating this legislation, and at that time the opposition moved an amendment to make machetes a prohibited weapon because the government failed to move the very amendment that they have had to bring in now and that we are debating today. Two weeks ago those opposite were actually condemning the very thing that they are coming into this chamber today and saying the government has done such a wonderful job with: 'We have listened to the community.' What changed over those two weeks other than the polls showed that this government is heading in one direction, and those sitting on that side of the chamber are very, very worried about holding on to their own seats? That is no way to govern this state.

There is one job that this government, that any government in this country, must put forward against anything else, and that is keeping the community safe – making sure that Victorians feel safe in their own homes, in their businesses, when they are taking their kids to school. But under this government, under the Allan government and under this Premier's leadership Victorians do not feel safe and they are not safe. A day does not go by where I do not hear from my community about another aggravated burglary in someone's home, a home invasion in the middle of the night, a machete in someone's hands as they approach the front door of their house. It is under this government's watch.

Let us be very, very clear: we were in this chamber in the last sitting week debating this piece of legislation. We put forward the amendment. In fact the coalition put forward the amendment and a private members bill 477 days ago. We have made four attempts to make machetes a prohibited weapon in this state. We have made four attempts, and what do we know? Nearly 15,000 knives, swords, daggers and machetes were confiscated last year. That is 40 weapons a day last year. Yet two weeks ago the government did not see it as an imperative to actually make sure that machetes were declared a prohibited weapon.

We have seen an absolute U-turn from the government over the past week when it comes to crime in this state, but for those of us that have been sitting here for 2½ years listening to those opposite say, 'There's no crime crisis when it comes to the rising rates of youth crime. There's no issue with bail in this state. In fact let's weaken bail laws.' We saw the debate yesterday around bail. Of course it was a debate that was only allowed to last 2 hours in this place – 2 hours of debate after the opposition received the bill less than 24 hours before – and it was guillotined and voted on.

I did have a look back at what some of the members opposite have been saying about machetes and what they have been saying about the coalition's attempt to actually introduce and strengthen our bail laws and our machete laws in this state. What I noted was particularly from a number of members, and I turn to the member for Tarneit, who often speaks on private members bills in this place. He said:

I am proud that this government, unlike those opposite, are not resorting to desperate tough-on-crime ... politics, and we never, ever will.

I wonder if the member for Tarneit raised the issue of the bail bill being called the 'tough bail' bill after his being so concerned about using the language of tough on crime. He went on to say:

Some may prefer that tough-on-crime approach for young children, but evidence shows that this does not work.

So what has changed? What has changed in terms of the approach last week and the week before and for two years in this place that this government has not been concerned about taking an actual tough-on-crime approach? What has changed? Politics has changed. The Premier is getting very, very

worried about holding on to her position, and that is what has changed in this place. It has nothing to do with keeping the community safe – absolutely nothing. Yet here we are today with another rushed piece of legislation.

I note the member for Albert Park said yesterday that it cannot be both overdue and rushed. Well, it certainly can, because we have had two pieces of legislation in this place in this week that have been both of those. They are overdue because we have been calling for this for years. The crime statistics do not lie. We do not lie. We have the highest number of criminal incidents in Victoria since the crime statistics began. We have the highest rates of youth crime since 2009. That is a 15-year high, yet those on that side of the house every single day for the past 2½ years have stood up and said there is not an issue. In fact what have they done? They have weakened the laws in this state. They have made it possible for repeat offenders to go out on bail time and time again and to terrorise families every night. That is what is happening in this state under this government's watch. The amendments that the government have brought in today are rushed. They are rushed because they have not, once again, tried to make sure these will have an impact here and now for the community.

These amendments will not come into effect for 288 days. On the one hand we had the Premier and the police minister come out last week and hold a series of press conferences saying, 'We've listened. We accept we are not on the right path, that we have made terrible mistakes that have put Victorian lives at risk, cost Victorians their lives,' because suddenly things have been raised on FM radio and 'Oh, gosh, we'd better react.' We saw the Premier and the police minister hold a series of press conferences, yet clearly the work behind the scenes had not been done. We had to wait until the eleventh hour or the twelfth hour to see the legislation produced and make sure that we could analyse that legislation. Finally, when it did come in, what did we see? We saw the fact that there is going to be 288 days before this piece of legislation even has an effect. That is why the member for Brighton on behalf of the shadow minister has moved a series of amendments, because we are not going to stand by and allow this to happen and continue in this state, making people feel unsafe in their homes night after night because machetes are allowed to be sold and that people are allowed to hold machetes for days and weeks and months to come. That is unacceptable, and that is certainly not doing anything to strengthen the laws in this state.

Last year we saw 40 weapons a day seized – 40 weapons a day under this government – yet time and time again we have seen those opposite vote against the very amendments that they are now bringing forward. Four times over the course of this Parliament has each and every member on the government side voted against making a machete a prohibited weapon. What has changed? Those members sit there and then lecture the opposition from their talking points. I do not know how they are able to formulate the words. Every single member on the government side has a lot to answer for for voting against trying to make the machete a prohibited weapon four times over the past two years. This has meant that Victorians have been less safe.

We have seen shocking incidents in this state where machetes have been used to go into people's homes and hold them at knifepoint. They hold small business owners at knifepoint while they rob their shops. It is appalling that it has been allowed to occur time and time again. Yet when the government finally come to the table and accept, 'Well, maybe there is a problem, but more importantly we'd better react to the politics because we're sliding so quickly in the polls,' they say, 'Not right now, though. We'll give it a little bit more time. We'll give it a few more weeks, we'll give it a few more months.' It will not be until the end of this year before we actually see these amendments take effect and the sale of machetes in this state prohibited.

This government has so much to answer for. They are derelict in their duty in keeping this community safe. Not a day goes by when I do not hear from another member of my community saying they do not feel safe in their home. It should be the number one priority of any government to keep the community safe, but under the Premier, under the Allan Labor government, time and time again those members have voted against the opportunity to keep Victorians safe. Victorians are paying the price for this weak government.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (12:19): Today I rise to contribute on the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024. I was disappointed that I did not get to speak on it in the last sitting week, but I am pleased that it has come back with the amendments from the Legislative Council. They have delivered two amendments back to this place – namely, an amendment to create longer term designated areas under the Control of Weapons Act 1990 and an amendment to reclassify machetes as prohibited weapons under the act.

When Victoria Police are designating areas, they will only be as large as is reasonably necessary to respond to the threat of violence or disorder. It can only be for a maximum of six months at a time, and it will be declared as will be reasonably necessary. It will be done with transparency, being met through publication of the sites and timeframes in the *Government Gazette* and also on the Victoria Police website. It will be at sites like train stations and shopping centres, and under these reforms it will be unable to be declared for longer periods of time.

We see during peak times, such as the school holidays and over the summer months, the risk of weapon-related violence increases. I know we have seen that in my particular electorate, and I will come to that very shortly. The amendment gives Victoria Police more flexibility so they can be present for longer in the areas where police intelligence tells us that there is an increased risk of violence. We also know that in giving police these search powers there is a definite deterrent effect for people considering carrying weapons with them. We know that it will stop some people just with the stop-and-search powers or the threat of stop-and-search powers at certain locations – in particular, as I say, shopping centres.

I want to give a shout-out to VicPol right across the state for the great work that they do, and I congratulate them on voting up their new enterprise bargaining agreement; it is well deserved. But I want to give a big shout-out to the VicPol members in my electorate of Melton under the leadership of Lisa Prentice-Evans. Lisa has been in the city working for a few months and I think is now working out in the northern area but will come back to Melton. Pat Cantone has been running the place out at Melton for a few months and is doing a fantastic job. They are always very responsive to all the issues that I have raised that have come through my office and that I have raised directly with the local members.

I have spoken previously about the banning of machetes. It was only six months ago that I spoke in the chamber about a fatal incident at the Woodgrove shopping centre in Melton that did result in the death of a young man, a 16-year-old youth. It was a stabbing, but it was not with a machete, it was with a knife. Again, such a tragic event has destroyed two families – the offender and his family and of course the youth who died as an outcome of this incident. We have had a number of events out my way in Melton – families being affected by knife attacks and machete attacks right through that western corridor. There was another young man attacked in Melton just before Christmas. He was stabbed to death in the driveway of a residential apartment block. He was chased down by a gang of youths and stabbed in this driveway. I believe the police have apprehended someone for that stabbing.

The member for Narre Warren North referred earlier in her contribution to the two young brothers, one in their early 20s and the other one in their mid-20s, who were both stabbed to death six months apart. The family had to deal with that – a really tragic outcome. The father of those two young boys was in Parliament only a few weeks ago when the African Youth Initiative played the movie *Reclaimed Voices*. The theme around that movie was giving the African youth perspective in regard to how they are treated within the community, how isolated some of them are and how some of them did turn to crime. The father, Antipas, who was there – I have met with Antipas on a number of occasions – came in to watch the movie but also to express his issues and concerns around youth crime and in particular knife crime, and I thank him for it. There was a fifth young fella from Staughton College, which is one of the secondary schools in Melton, who was stabbed to death at a bus stop in Sunshine. I think he was only 15 at the time. Again it was a gang of youths that attacked him at that bus stop, and unfortunately he lost his life.

I have previously spoken about supermarket restrictions – banning the stocking of knives and the sale of knives. I know at the Woodgrove shopping centre the Woolworths store after the event at Woodgrove where the young man was stabbed last year stopped the stocking and selling of knives. They did not sell machetes, but they certainly did sell knives. By declaring machetes as a prohibited weapon it moves them into the highest restricted weapon category in Victoria, and if you are found in possession of a machete after this amendment is made you will be charged with a serious criminal offence, which will be punishable by two years jail or a fine of over \$47,000. If you are found with a machete before this becomes law, you are committing an offence anyway if you do not have a lawful reason for doing so. I have heard that some farmers may use machetes, some hobbyists may use machetes. There will be a process of exemption, and they can apply through that process, but again I would have thought there is an alternative to a machete to be used around a farm or for whatever hobbyists may use a machete for, but again there will be an exemption process that they could apply to.

I have spoken about this before when I have raised this issue about machetes – it might have been in a members statement of mine in the past – and in a previous role that I had as a paramedic I witnessed the damage of knife attack and machete attack. Machetes are a chopping machine, let me tell you, and if you have ever seen a human body chopped up by a machete it is not a nice view; and to try and patch a human body up that has been chopped up by a machete is not an easy job, let me tell you. When you use a machete into soft tissue, if you can picture just chopping into a piece of meat that you might put on the barbecue, it is similar; that is similar to what would happen with a human body. If a machete hits a skull it can split a skull like if you were splitting a watermelon. It is tragic; it is absolutely tragic. And if you strike blood vessels, well, obviously depending on the blood vessel you strike, clearly someone could bleed out. If you strike nerves, they may be repaired, but you will probably never get the full use of that limb ever again. As I said, these weapons do serious damage. I have not been on the road as a paramedic since 1995, and I am talking back in my days, back through the 1980s and 90s where machetes were used, and in particular in areas like Sunshine and St Albans, where I worked on the road, they were a weapon of choice. So this is not new. This is not new, but they are very dangerous in the hands of people.

One of the things that we are not concentrating on here in the debate is that we can remove machetes or ban machetes and we can remove edged knives from shops, but one thing that I think we have also got to concentrate on is the mindset of our youth and changing their culture and why they think they need to carry a knife – and we need to work a lot on that. That comes back to the family doing a lot of work, the community doing a lot of work. There are a lot of good community groups that are out there at the moment and there are a lot of programs. We need to educate and inform our youth that they do not need to resort to carrying knives. Even in banning machetes, will they still have a mindset to go for something else in lieu of a machete? Do they make their own type of weapon that can still do the same type of damage? I hope not. I think that is one area that I would like to see us concentrate on also in supporting the banning of these weapons. I commend these amendments to this house.

**Chris CREWHER** (Mornington) (12:29): I rise to speak on the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024. Unlike for the member for Melton there are no flies over here, but there are flies over this state Labor government. This is a politically motivated, rushed and flawed attempt by the Allan Labor government to salvage its leadership and to salvage its party and to fix a problem of its own making. For example, the latest poll shows that Labor have dropped 22 per cent in their primary vote, and they had a huge swing in Werribee.

Machete bans and the so-called tough bail bill are not the result of careful policy deliberation, expert consultation or a genuine commitment to making Victoria safer. This bill, along with the so-called tough bail bill, is a knee-jerk reaction. It is a knee-jerk reaction after we have attempted to bring bans of machetes and to restrengthen bail laws multiple times. On machetes, we have tried to bring a bill

not just once, not just twice, not just three times, but four times. On the bail bill, we have tried to do that multiple times as well –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Chris CREWITHER:** as the member for Brighton notes, three times. That is at least seven times in total, across the machetes bill and the bail bill, that we have tried to take action. We have tried to take action because we have actually been listening to the community. Labor are supposedly finally ‘listening’ to the community, but this is really a response to their failing leadership and their failures in the polls.

If we look at the years of Labor that we have had, we have had 11 years of Labor and we will have had, by the next election, 23 out of 27 years of Labor. They have weakened bail laws. We have less consequences for offenders. We have a shortage of at least 1100 in police numbers. We have lowered reception hours at multiple police stations across Victoria, including in Mornington in my electorate. We have seen the age of criminal responsibility increased. Yet despite all this, as mentioned, Labor have continued to block our attempts to take action in these areas but have finally caved to community and our pressure.

We do need stronger bail laws. We do need to ban machetes. We do need to fill the 1100 police spots. We do need increased 24-hour reception at police stations so, for example, someone who is a victim of domestic violence turns up at 11 pm to a police station which is unattended, which has actually happened, does not get beaten to a pulp after that. This should not be happening in our community.

We should have stronger consequences for offenders as well. Consequences are not always just jail. Let us say someone lights a fire. In the past – and I spoke to a local CFA captain about this – back in the 1980s and 90s, someone who lit a fire might have been made to do 80 hours worth of volunteer work at the local CFA. That enabled them to see the consequences of their action, but it also sometimes meant that person went on to be a regular volunteer with the CFA and to actually do something positive for the community. It is very similar to parenting. When parenting, you need to give positive thrills to young people or you need positive things for them to do in the community, in sports and so forth. But you also need discipline and consequences, and we have had a lack of both in our community, particularly during the last 11 years under Labor.

Going past machetes as well, banning machetes obviously deals more with the consequences of offending, but we need to do a lot more around prevention as well. I do believe that the debt levels that Labor has put us into have led to a situation where we are underinvesting in prevention, which will lead to greater consequences in terms of offending in the long run, as we have already been seeing. One thing I have suggested, which actually works very well, is the Icelandic prevention program, which is being rolled out by Planet Youth internationally, included in Mexico. I know that Australia has trialled it in a few other locations in the past, with some federal funding via the Alcohol and Drug Foundation and local drug action team funding. The fact is that youth prefer negative thrills over boredom. If they are bored, they will choose negative things to do, so we need to give youth positive things to do and positive incentives so they do not go out and commit crimes. One example is Quinn’s Place in my electorate of Mornington, which operates on a Friday night. It was set up by the mother of a young person who unfortunately, tragically, died a couple of years ago. It gives positive thrills to youth on a Friday night without drugs or alcohol. These are the sorts of activities we need in our community to prevent crime, including machete crimes as well. In addition to that, I think we need things like police back in schools, with active police going into classes and teaching in classes to get youth reconnected with our policing system.

Just looking into crime statistics across Victoria, we have seen residential aggravated burglaries increase by an alarming 24 per cent across Victoria, including 19 homes a day being violently invaded, and that includes many in my electorate, unfortunately, in Mornington. We have also seen motor vehicle thefts rise by 33 per cent, with a car stolen every 20 minutes, and criminal offences are up by

32 per cent on the Mornington Peninsula, where my electorate is based, in the last 12 months. Last year over 10,000 knives, swords and machetes were seized by police and over 115,000 in the last decade. In the last week we have seen news reports of a young person, I believe a 24-year-old, who was killed with a machete in Lyndhurst. So Labor has a history of failures in this area, and Labor has constantly got it wrong on crime.

477 days ago the opposition first pushed for a ban on machetes. Labor refused our calls to ban machetes on these four different occasions. Of course we have got the bail changes this week, but every time we have tried to make these changes in the past, as I mentioned earlier in this speech, it has been blocked by Labor. In 2023 this Labor government weakened bail laws too much, letting criminals back on the street, and we are seeing report after report of people offending, reoffending and reoffending over and over again, offence after offence with little to no consequences. It is indeed a revolving door. When I used to work at the ACT Magistrates Court many years ago, working as an associate to a magistrate, we actually had a revolving door at the entrance of the ACT Magistrates Court. We always used to refer to it as a revolving door because unfortunately – this is in the ACT at the time, which unfortunately has now been reflected in Victoria – we would remand someone, but they would then appeal to the Supreme Court, they would be released the next week and then we would see them back committing yet another offence again and again and again.

This government cannot be trusted on crime and tackling crime. I note as well that this bill will not take effect for a little while. The opposition is pushing to bring this forward by three months because every delay means more stabbings, more home invasions, more carjackings and potentially more lives lost, just like the 24-year-old man in Lyndhurst the other day. The government's excuse about safe disposal is weak, and other jurisdictions have implemented bans faster. There is also a lack of clarity around things in this bill that will be consequences of this bill, as raised earlier with the question of: what is the definition of a machete? Is it a 20-centimetre knife or is it a 30-centimetre knife? The government have not actually clearly explained how this ban will work in practice, and they have not clearly articulated the terms of the exemption approval framework for farmers, tradespeople, historical collectors and so forth.

This bill – and the bail bill as well – is a reaction. It is a reaction not just to us advocating for the last two years but to the community and the suffering that the community is experiencing at the hands of people wielding machetes but also with increased crimes, with carjackings, with home invasions and more. The government does need to better fund and resource police. They do need more preventative programs, particularly for youth. They do need greater investment in mental health services to prevent crimes before they happen. We do need more police in the streets, strong intervention programs and investment in rehabilitation.

I will go into the amendments that we are putting forward in my last 20 seconds. I do note that we are pushing for bringing forward the start date of the machete ban by three months, and the government should agree to this. We are also pushing to bring forward the banning of the sale of machetes immediately. The government needs to start listening to community, start listening to the Liberals and Nationals and do something.

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (12:39): I am delighted to rise in support of the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024. Before I start, as a local member I have the opportunity many times to speak to our community members when doorknocking, at street stalls and at community events. We listen keenly, and that is why we are very supportive of this amendment, because the government has listened to the community about safety.

Not long ago, about two weeks ago, I, the hardworking local member for Mulgrave and the member for Mordialloc attended the community safety forum in the City of Greater Dandenong. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Victoria Police and our police in the south-east, Mark Langhorn and many of his colleagues, who work day in, day out to ensure that the safety of our community comes first, above all else.

That is why these amendments have come about, with an amendment to create a longer term designated area under the Control of Weapons Act 1990 and an amendment to reclassify machetes as a prohibited weapon under the act. That is why we are here today. These amendments are being made after close consultation with Victoria Police. I am also proud – I joined this Parliament in 2018 – of the investment that the Allan Labor government and the Daniel Andrews Labor government have made in our police force: 3600 police officers, who day in, day out ensure that our community is safe and that we feel safe to go out at night in our communities. That alone, I would say, says something about this government. We know that further strengthening the Control of Weapons Act with these amendments will help our police officers to detect weapons and deter people from using them in the first place. That is why I support these amendments, and I ask that these amendments speedily pass this house.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (12:42): It is a pleasure to make a contribution to the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024. I want to begin my contribution by, I guess, highlighting some of the challenges for the crossbench in this place when it comes to deliberating on amendments of this nature. The government of course is in control of the process in this place, as we know, and that is fair enough. They are the government. They won the election; they got the majority of members. The opposition, despite suffering some of the same disadvantages the crossbench does, does not suffer one of the unique disadvantages of the crossbench in that they have members in the other place who can obviously socialise what is happening in the other place, and they also have parliamentary advisers. The Greens party have parliamentary advisers. But those of us who sit on the crossbench do not have parliamentary advisers, so it is very difficult to be on top of the detail of what is coming from the other place back to this chamber, particularly when we do not have sufficient notice about what is happening.

I was not offered a briefing on this bill. I had to seek one, and it is only, I suspect, because I sought one that I received a briefing on what was coming back from the other place. I think that, frankly, is not good enough. I think far better would be that if substantive changes to legislation are being made in the other place, and they are ultimately changes that are going to be supported by the majority in this chamber, we are given a proper briefing on them and an opportunity to reflect on them and understand them. For that reason, I am frankly struggling to land a position on elements of this bill in the very limited time we have and with the even more limited resources we as the crossbench have available to us.

By way of expanding upon that point, I note that the clause notes in the original bill – the unamended bill – talk about the purposes being to refine the functions of the Department of Justice and Community Safety secretary and the Countering Violent Extremism Multi-agency Panel and, further, to amend the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to make further provision for the declaration of designated areas and make other minor amendments. The original bill makes no reference to what has come back to this chamber today. The original bill was not a bill about banning machetes; it is only the amended bill.

So effectively we are being handed a substantive piece of legislation on next to no notice, consistent with the government's practice in this chamber right throughout the course of this week, no resources to properly analyse it, no resources to properly contemplate the full effect of the changes and absolutely zero chance to consult with stakeholders, and we are being asked to vote on the thing. We are not even being asked to vote on it at the guillotine tomorrow. I understand we are likely to be asked to vote on it today. That is an appallingly rushed process, consistent with a government that is seeking only to serve political ends, not to serve policy ends. This is classic policy on the fly that is being driven, it would appear, by a bunch of bad polls and a bunch of cruddy headlines in the *Herald Sun* and not by sound, well-reasoned, well thought out and well-considered policymaking imperatives. So that is my first objection, before we even get to the substance of the bill, to the way in which this bill is being treated in this chamber today.

To the further point around process, this is frankly a cheeky use of an existing bill to bring these amendments to the chamber. These amendments could have been introduced as a standalone bill and

it would not be debated in this way and on this day, because there are some procedural safeguards around governments ramming things through the Parliament. Those safeguards are frankly skirted by having these amendments introduced into a bill that was not actually about – the phrase ‘control of weapons’ can be in the title – what weapons and in what way. Those amendments were about the way in which police conduct searches for weapons. It is a cheeky use and I would say potentially a misuse of the forms and the processes of the Parliament to be going about this change in this manner, using amendments in the other place to be able to get changes through this chamber without anything like the appropriate level of scrutiny and without anything like the appropriate level of procedural due diligence.

Turning to the substance of the bill, just like the bill that was debated in this place yesterday, this is a case of the government urgently, urgently, urgently making a change in nine months or urgently, urgently, urgently making a change in six months. So urgent is it that it must be rammed through this place without due consideration, and yet the commencement is many, many, many months down the line, and I just have not been persuaded on – nor have I even been asked for a view on – whether it is appropriate to go about these changes in this way. What actually is driving the urgency that we have to condense the legislative process so substantially in order to meet an artificial deadline that is six months hence? It will make no substantive difference whether these amendments were debated in here in two weeks time if the effective date is not until 31 December, or further to the member for Brighton’s amendments, whether the effective date becomes 30 September. It just simply will make no substantive difference. It will make a difference to the quality of the consideration of the amendments, it will make a difference to the quality of the legislative outcome, it will make a difference to the quality of the engagement with all members in this chamber, but it will not make any substantive difference to what the government is trying to achieve, and I simply do not understand why it is that we are being asked to consider these particular amendments in this way.

Turning to the substance of what is being proposed – albeit, as I have said, by way of amendments that have not been conveyed appropriately for the crossbench to be able to adequately consider them – what is being proposed, amongst other things but principally, is a ban on machetes where the definition of ‘machete’ is not provided. The dictionary definition I think is ‘a blade with a handle’, and I am pretty sure we can all come up with plenty of examples of blades with handles that are not machetes. I was using one last night to slice up lamb for my kids’ rolls for today. I am pretty sure I was not engaged in a knife crime. But it is entirely possible that if the legislative drafting is not done with a degree of precision I might find myself in possession of a prohibited weapon. I will further add that, like many people, I have taken souvenirs when I have gone on international holidays – or international adventures, in the case that I am about to outline. In 1995 I went to Nepal. I was very fortunate to travel to that part of the world, and I bought a ceremonial knife which is a key part of Nepalese custom, and that knife might very well be caught by this language and be caught by this ban. Whether it will be ultimately exempted depends on what the exemptions look like, and we do not know what they look like, not least because this legislation is being so rushed, being hammered through this chamber, without due consideration and without due debate, and I think that is hugely problematic.

The second thing is whether in fact the prohibition tool rather than the control tool – that is, the ‘prohibited weapons’ language rather than the ‘controlled weapons’ language – is the right tool to actually fix the problem, because the problem, as I understand it and as enunciated by members of the government, is not that people own machetes; it is that people in possession of machetes are using them in furtherance of other crimes. What they are not doing is talking about whether those machetes are in and of themselves problematic. I query and would love the government to address whether or not the sheer fact of ownership of a machete – the sheer fact of having something that meets this definition of a machete or the sheer fact of having a knife in the back drawer at home that is not a kitchen knife but some other kind of knife – is in fact the sort of thing that we ought to be regulating out of existence.

Finally, in the very limited time I have had to both speak on and consider these matters, I want to say that the amnesty is farcical – pure political theatre. It offers absolutely no substantive change to the prevalence or otherwise of knife crime in Victoria. It will do absolutely nothing about it, because you will see some law-abiding citizens handing in knives that were otherwise not being used for knife crimes and you will see none of the kids who many in this place have said are running around with machetes participating in an amnesty. It would be far better to prohibit their carriage and use and far better to stop them being sold, but this amnesty will do absolutely nothing to solve any of the problems the government is seeking to solve.

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (12:52): Six and a half years ago the coalition went to the election telling Victorians we have an issue with weapons as dangerous and destructive as machetes, to the extent that they must be banned and the importation of them must be stopped. We were ridiculed and opposed by the Labor Party, like we were the four times the coalition proposed bans to this chamber and said that these weapons should not be normalised, they should not be allowed for sale and they must be banned. Now we find the Labor Party, down in the polls with a problem on law and order, finally saying, six years later, ‘We might have a problem, but we’re going to fix it, maybe, in nine months time.’ Do not wait nine months. Do it straightaway. That is what the Liberal and National parties say. Why has it taken the government so long to understand that these weapons should not be allowed for importation or sale? Why has it taken 6½ years for the Labor Party to understand that these are not a weapon for a 16-year-old in a lounge room with his mates, having home-invaded a terrorised family who are in their bathroom with their feet against the door because the police have not turned up yet? This is not something that should be tolerated. It should not have taken 6½ years for the government to finally say, ‘We’re down in the polls. Gee, let’s have a political response.’

There is no political response to human safety. There is a sensible, immediate policy response, and that should be the response of everyone in this chamber as an elected member of Parliament. This chamber knew this would be a problem 6½ years ago, and the Labor Party ridiculed our solutions, like they ridiculed the need for increased police numbers, which they then came around to and accepted needed to be done, like they ridiculed the concept of mandatory sentencing for offences like, for instance, one-punch-can-kill offences, for God’s sake, which still do not have mandatory laws attached to them, and like they ridiculed the concept that youth crime was out of control in this state. The Premier of this state was one of the key people who criticised and ridiculed the coalition for coming to Victorians and saying we have a major problem in the making that must be solved now.

There is a reason that bikie gangs were leaving the Gold Coast and setting up in Victoria. We see on our building sites today why they are in Victoria. When you weaken laws and you allow your state’s law and order system to work in favour of those who break it, not those who in fact try to adhere to keeping the law, then what you get is a product of Victoria 2025, a state that has become in many ways lawless compared to others in Australia that did not need to get to this stage. In the last few weeks a teen attacked a man in St Kilda with a machete. A woman’s hand was slashed in a random machete attack in a car just two weeks ago. There was a violent crime spree three weeks ago. I could keep going. These things should not be the norm. They have become the norm under a government that has failed to accept that these things have been brewing as a problem. People in this chamber sought to solve this problem six to seven years ago, but the government denied it. The government abused those who tried to fix it. They threw all these kinds of terms at us: ‘It’s for this reason, it’s for that reason’ – all politics.

This bill should not be about politics, because human safety is certainly and should be the primary reason we are here – the preservation and protection of human safety and human life. But the fact that we have got to this stage with this bill with this Premier, who ridiculed solutions to these problems seven years ago, who now comes in seeking a political response, says everything about this government and the failure of this government to tackle a crime problem that should have been tackled seven years ago.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters):** There being no further speakers, the minister has moved that the amendments of the Legislative Council be agreed to. The member for Brighton has moved some amendments to the Council's amendments. I will therefore split the question on the Council amendments to allow the member for Brighton's amendments to be considered. I advise that, if the member for Brighton's amendment 1 is not agreed to, his remaining amendments will fail, as they are consequential.

**Assembly divided on James Newbury's amendment 1:**

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

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

**Amendment defeated.**

**Assembly divided on Council amendment 1:**

*Ayes (77):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Josh Bull, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Annabelle Cleeland, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Chris Crewther, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Emma Kealy, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, Danny Pearson, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Richard Riordan, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Emma Vulin, Peter Walsh, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

*Noes (3):* Gabrielle de Vietri, Tim Read, Ellen Sandell

**Amendment agreed to.**

**Assembly divided on Council amendments 2 to 10:**

*Ayes (77):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Josh Bull, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Annabelle Cleeland, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Chris Crewther, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Emma Kealy, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-

Ward, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, Danny Pearson, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Richard Riordan, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Emma Vulin, Peter Walsh, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

*Noes (3):* Gabrielle de Vietri, Tim Read, Ellen Sandell

**Amendments agreed to.**

**The SPEAKER:** A message will be sent to the Legislative Council informing them accordingly.

**Sitting suspended 1:09 pm until 2:02 pm.**

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

**The SPEAKER:** Can I acknowledge in the gallery today the US consul general Conrad Tribble and former minister Luke Donnellan.

*Members*

**Minister for Government Services**

*Absence*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today and tomorrow the Minister for Emergency Services will answer questions for the portfolios of government services, women, prevention of family violence and treaty and First Peoples.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Victoria Police**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. When was the decision made not to renew the contracts of chief commissioner Shane Patton and deputy chief commissioner Neil Paterson?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): In acknowledging the Leader of the Opposition's question and acknowledging that the base of the Leader of the Opposition's question comes from reports that have been published today that contain a number of baseless allegations, I am going to continue to support the work of Victoria Police and the men and women of Victoria Police.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was a very, very narrow question in relation to when the decision was made. What date was the decision made for the dismissal of Shane Patton and Neil Paterson?

**The SPEAKER:** The Leader of the Opposition cannot use a point of order to repeat the question. On relevance, the Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** In terms of the question from the Leader of the Opposition, it also contains a baseless allegation. The former chief commissioner –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Pascoe Vale can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Pascoe Vale withdrew from chamber.**

**Brad Battin:** On a further point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, there were zero allegations made in this question. It was a simple question: what date was this decision made? There were no allegations at all within the question.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. The Premier was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I was responding to the question that was asked by the Leader of the Opposition. The decision to resign was made by the former Chief Commissioner of Police.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): When was Mr Rick Nugent first approached as the new chief commissioner in Victoria?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): Consistent with the statement that was released earlier today by the acting Chief Commissioner of Police, no contact was made with Mr Nugent on this matter prior to the weekend of 15 and 16 February.

#### Ministers statements: TAFE

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): I am delighted to advise the house that as of this month 200,000 Victorians have signed up for a free TAFE course right here in Victoria. It might be a young person, a mum or a dad kickstarting their future. They could be training to become nurses. They could be training to become builders or plumbers or early childhood educators – the kinds of people in our workforce that our state needs. They might also be upskilling to pursue that career they have always wanted to have but not been able to access without the support of my government’s free TAFE program. They could be other Victorians that want a bit of spice in life, want a bit of an adventure. They might want to go and study a certificate III in tourism, for example, and go and find work travelling on the high seas. But most importantly, what our free TAFE program means is there is \$600 million that is sitting with families right now because of our free TAFE program.

Contrast that to a different approach, which was cutting TAFE, shutting TAFE and locking the door. We remember well in Lilydale how we had to literally unlock the gates and invest in an important institute for our city and state. And because of that we can now see, as I said at the outset, 200,000 Victorians signing up for free TAFE to go and pursue their careers, to pursue their aspirations. We have supported TAFE, we have saved TAFE and we have made it free for those Victorians who want to pursue their career.

#### Victoria Police

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Minister for Police. Why was deputy commissioner Neil Paterson sacked after 37 years of service?

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:09): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I completely reject the premise of the question. It is an absurd notion. I have read the baseless allegations that have been reported today, and I make it very clear that we do not plan to politicise the matters that have been forwarded. The claims made by the Leader of the Opposition are absolutely false, and I reject the premise of the question completely.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister was debating the question. It was very narrow: why did the government sack this very experienced police officer?

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has answered the question. The minister has concluded his answer.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): Did the minister or anyone in his private office or department directly contact the Victoria Police commissioner Rick Nugent to dismiss the then deputy commissioner Neil Paterson?

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:10): In acknowledging the supplementary question from the

Leader of the Opposition, again I make it very clear Mr Paterson is on leave of his own choosing and the claims and the premise of the question from the Leader of the Opposition are baseless and false.

**Bridget Vallence:** Speaker, on a point of order on relevance, the question was about anyone from the minister's private office taking these actions. Could he be directed to be relevant to the question?

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has concluded his answer.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Polwarth can leave the chamber for an hour. Would anyone else like to speak while I am on my feet? The minister has concluded his answer.

**Member for Polwarth withdrew from chamber.**

**Ministers statements: school breakfast clubs**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:11): Just like a cruise ship needs fuel to travel from Brisbane to Airlie Beach, our kids need fuel to concentrate and work hard at school. Today the Premier and I visited Brunswick East Primary School, who have joined more than 1000 schools across our state delivering the school breakfast program. You know what, thanks to the last budget, we invested \$20 million on top of the \$160 million invested in this program, which is not only supporting the kids but supporting the parents with an important cost-of-living measure.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Nepean can leave the chamber for half an hour. The Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Nepean and Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs withdrew from chamber.**

**Ben CARROLL:** Those opposite might not be interested in this. They may have missed their breakfast or indeed missed their lunch, because we know the former leaders are working so hard they never got –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are an opportunity for the minister to countenance policy decisions, not attack the opposition, and I would ask you to ask him to desist doing so.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the minister to come back to his ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

**Ben CARROLL:** We are very proud of our school breakfast program. While some of those opposite might have been enjoying the Royal Caribbean ship *Quantum of the Seas* – I have got a copy of their menu here –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, I think the minister is defying your ruling on attacking the opposition. I would ask you to ask him again to desist doing so.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will come back to his statement without attacking the opposition.

**Ben CARROLL:** While today the Premier and I were serving Vegemite on toast and honey on toast, *Quantum of the Seas* was serving French crepes with Italian hazelnut spread; the member for Bulleen's favourite, lobster scrambled eggs; and the member for Hawthorn's favourite, honeymoon eggs, because the honeymoon is over.

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.**

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is again defying your ruling. Whilst we are probably all happy to hear what people's breakfast options are, the minister is defying your ruling.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask you to make your points of order succinct. The minister has concluded.

### Construction industry

**Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:15):** My question is to the Premier. In July last year in relation to corruption on Big Build sites, the Premier said:

... I outlined the very strong action that the government is taking to stamp out this rotten culture at its roots ...

Given recent media reports, why has the Premier clearly failed to stamp out union corruption?

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:15):** I reject the premise of the member for Lowan's question, and I will now go through the reasons why I reject the allegation that has been made in the member for Lowan's question. As I made clear in the middle of last year when there were a number of allegations that were made, we moved swiftly because we have zero tolerance for this sort of behaviour.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual. The Premier has known about this since 2016, this corruption, and she has done nothing to stamp it out.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** In both answering the question and responding to the baseless allegation in the point of order, I will take the house through –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question, which includes a quote from her. If there is a baseless claim, perhaps she should explain the baseless quote.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Can I remind the member for Lowan that I rejected the premise of her question, which is being relevant to the question that she asked. I am now detailing to the member for Lowan for her benefit –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, how can the Premier reject something is happening today on government building sites?

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** To reiterate for the benefit of the member for Lowan and the member for Evelyn, I was responding to the allegation that the member for Lowan made in her question about my actions. I am now taking the house through the actions that my government has taken, supporting of course the work of the federal government in appointing an administrator to address these issues. Of course following the allegations that were made in the middle of last year, I referred a range of allegations to both Victoria Police and IBAC. I wrote to the federal industrial relations minister asking for EBAs –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It is about what corruption is continuing on Big Build sites. Why has she failed to stop the corruption?

**Jacinta ALLAN:** On the point of order, Speaker, the question asked for a response to actions I have taken. I am giving a response to the member for Lowan on the actions that I have taken on this matter in the context of having zero tolerance for this behaviour on worksites in this state.

**Bridget Vallence:** Speaker, further to the point of order, the Premier seems to suggest the question asked for actions. It did not. It asked why she has failed to stamp out union corruption.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. I am starting to tire of the frivolous points of order. The Premier answered the question at the outset. The Premier can continue to answer the question now.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The further actions that I have taken, in addition to those that I have already outlined for the benefit of the member for Lowan, include bringing to his house legislation to ban from prescribed worksites members of organised crime groups and also work through the –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Lowan is warned. The Minister for Police is warned.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual, and that legislation has not even commenced yet.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Noting of course, as I said at the outset, that we strongly support the action taken by the federal government of the appointment of administrator and noting of course that industrial relations powers in this state are held by the federal government, in addition to those actions I have outlined to the house we have also had both an interim and a final report from Greg Wilson that looked at what further action we needed to take here in Victoria, acknowledging that there was clearly more work that we needed to do. That work is being implemented right now, including the implementation of a complaints referral body to receive complaints about allegations, noting that should anyone hold information or have an allegation of criminal behaviour on any worksite, it is my expectation that it of course be referred to Victoria Police for their investigation as the appropriate agency. In addition to that we are providing a mechanism through a complaints referral body. We are also putting in place a stronger alliance with federal and state regulatory agencies who have responsibility in this area.

**Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:20):** Why has this rotten culture, including violence against women, ghost shifts and taxpayer dollars being funnelled into the pockets of organised crime, continued to plague Big Build sites since the Premier vowed to stamp it out?

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21):** Again, in addition to those actions that I have outlined to the house, I want to reiterate that the reporting of the violence, particularly the violence perpetrated against women on worksites, was absolutely sickening. It is unacceptable. Everyone deserves the right to a safe workplace, which is why I understand, in terms of the incident that was televised, that Victoria Police are following up that matter, but also it is why, in addition to those actions that I have already outlined, in addition to the work that Victoria Police is undertaking in terms of having more resources brought to this work, it is important that anyone with allegations refer them to Victoria Police.

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the response. She is going around the fact that this question is: why has that culture continued? Why is corruption still happening on Big Build sites when she promised a year ago to stamp it out?

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Lowan, I ask you not to repeat the question in your point of order. The Premier was not debating the question, the Premier was being relevant to the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

#### **Ministers statements: energy policy**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:22):** Every day we in this government are focused on helping Victorian families with the cost of living, and our Victorian default offer is doing just that

when it comes to power bills. Under the draft VDO that was announced last week the average Victorian household on the default offer will pay \$448 per year less than those living in South Australia, New South Wales or Queensland. For small businesses it is an even bigger difference, with small businesses on the VDO paying on average \$1583 per year less than small businesses in other states.

337,000 Victorian households and 56,000 small businesses rely on the Victorian default offer. When we brought the VDO in in 2019 to cut power bills we cut standing offer prices by 24 per cent in the first year. Even today default offer prices are still almost 10 per cent below what they were before the VDO. We know there is more work to be done, but our VDO right now is making a big difference compared to other states.

Those Victorians not on the VDO also are paying lower retail power prices than in other states. Our record investments in cheap renewable energy are driving these lower prices and lower bills. It is not the only way we are helping families save on their power bills: we have more and bigger Victorian energy upgrade discounts than ever before, the Solar Homes rebates, the Victorian Energy Compare website and more.

We are continuing to work hard every day finding ways and implementing ways to help households with the cost of living and the supports that we are giving, while Gilligan and his motley crew over there on the *Minnow* are still on their 3-hour tour of opposition. But Gilligan is actually not holding the wheel, because he is sunbaking on the deck because he has forgotten he is the captain of the ship. That is what we have got from those opposite.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, former Speaker Brooks's ruling is quite clear that ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition purely because the minister has nothing better to say.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has concluded her ministers statement.

### Housing

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:25): My question is to the Premier. The Labor government plans to demolish 44 public housing towers across Victoria, starting with Alfred Street in North Melbourne in my electorate. Last week the Labor government confirmed that once Alfred Street is demolished no state-run public housing will be built on this site at all – absolutely none. Most of the housing will be expensive private housing; some will be community housing. Many residents at Alfred Street only accepted relocation offers because they were assured by Homes Victoria and this Labor government that they would be able to return to public housing rent and conditions, not community housing, which has different rent and conditions. Now it is clear people cannot return to public housing because none will be built. Why did this government mislead my residents?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:26): Thanking the member for Melbourne for her question, I do make the point that these are residents in public housing who deserve to have the support of the state and, yes, their local member to provide them with accurate and important information and to not necessarily mislead them in terms of what is going on across the 44 public housing towers program. I do say this in the context of the constant demonisation by the Greens political party of community housing as a really good support for people who need the government to be investing in a roof over their head and for people who rely on government investment in providing homes. The reason why I say this is community housing providers are not-for-profit providers, and they also provide additional supports. When you consider that there are many vulnerable Victorians who live in these properties who get a range of services thanks to the hard work of community housing providers, I just will not accept the constant demonisation from the Greens political party of a community housing sector who work damn hard every day, every single day, and frankly deserve better than this constant smear that they get from the Greens political party.

What we are going to do is continue to get on and invest. Whether it is in the public housing towers program or whether it is through our Big Housing Build in all corners of the state, we are going to continue to invest. We have a partner in Canberra through the Albanese Labor government, and we do note too that a lot of that carry-on in Canberra came from the Greens political party holding up the investment in public housing in Victoria for their own political posturing purposes. Well, we are getting on and delivering a program, whether it is in the housing towers, across our Big Housing Build or indeed right across the state, and building more homes for more Victorians.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:28): The red-brick towers on Nicholson Street in Carlton, also in my electorate, are also being demolished. The government previously committed to rebuilding these with government owned and run public housing, not community housing – that was a commitment. However, the community has recently noticed the government’s language has changed, and public communications now only talk about social housing, not public housing. Can the Premier confirm that the red-brick towers in Carlton will definitely be replaced with 100 per cent state-run public housing, not any other form of housing, or is she admitting that this government is washing its hands of state-run public housing entirely?

**The SPEAKER:** There were actually two questions there, member for Melbourne. I will allow the Premier to decide which one to answer.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:29): I make the point to the member for Melbourne that we are investing \$6.3 billion through our Big Housing Build. I would say that is a significant investment in putting in more homes for more Victorians, for vulnerable Victorians. I go back to this very binary argument that the member for Melbourne is putting – government-owned, not community, housing. Well, when we invest and partner with community housing providers, that is government investment, that is supporting community housing providers to provide a very strong program of support.

**Ellen Sandell:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was: are you building public housing at Carlton or not? Are you going to commit to it or not?

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Melbourne, I ask you not to repeat the question in your point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will make this very clear to the Greens political party: you can continue with your campaign of division; we are going to get on and invest in building more homes and, yes, partner with the community housing sector and deliver more homes through our Big Housing Build to support Victorians right across the state.

#### **Ministers statements: outdoor recreation**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:30): I rise to update the house about how the Allan Labor government are helping families with the cost of living through their record-breaking investment into the outdoors. We know busy families deserve a great holiday in the great outdoors, and some of the best places are right here in Victoria. They can do that for free under our government. Currently all national and state parks have free camping. This builds on our government’s half-price camping, which started in 2019 and since then has saved a staggering \$26 million for families. We know this initiative provides a big boost to regional economies, with heaps of Melburnians and others going there. While those opposite like cruising in other states, Victorian families like spending money in Victoria at campgrounds.

Over 10 years our government has invested heavily in the great outdoors in Victoria – \$106 million in just one program in the great outdoors program, creating new assets like the Point Nepean National Park, 155 kilometres of upgraded four-wheel drive tracks and much more. Add to that mix the fare cap that we have provided to all of regional Victoria. It is much easier to go into the great outdoors.

Every year there are 50 million visits to our national and state parks – camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, four-wheel driving and a lot more. While others talk a big game about investments in regional and rural Victoria, this side of politics continues to invest in rural and regional Victoria.

I would like to give a shout-out to the Grampians. I just got back from there a couple of weeks ago. Even though I do not boast about it like some others, I have been there about half a dozen times at least in the last 12 months. I went and met with businesses –

*Members interjecting.*

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** A bit brittle, aren't we?

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, a ministers statement is not a time to critique the opposition, particularly when I was there on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and –

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Lowan can leave the chamber for an hour and a half. There is no point of order.

**Member for Lowan withdrew from chamber.**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS:** I met with many business owners, and I expect everybody in this chamber to go down there in the next few months and support that great community.

#### **Construction industry**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:33): My question is to the Premier. With \$50 billion in cost blowouts on government projects, how much of this has been caused by the funnelling of taxpayer funds to organised crime?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:33): There are a number of allegations that were made in the Leader of the Opposition's question. Consistent with my answer to previous questions, I would suggest if the Leader of the Opposition has any allegations to make he refers them to Victoria Police, because I have zero tolerance for any criminal behaviour on worksites. As I have demonstrated in an answer to a previous question in this place, I have outlined the range of actions that we are taking here in Victoria to support the work –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Frankston can leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour and a half.

**Members for Frankston and Tarneit withdrew from chamber.**

**Bridget Vallence:** Speaker, on a point of order, the Premier is clearly debating the question. The question was narrow – about taxpayer funds being funnelled to organised crime – and I would have thought the Premier would want to actually find that out.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was not debating the question. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question. She was being relevant to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** In addition to those actions that we are taking, in addition to the work of the federal government administrator that has been appointed to deal with what has elements of a rotten culture – we strongly support the actions of the administrator – I do make this point to workers across all of our construction sites, whether they be government –

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, this is a very clear question. There has been \$50 billion of cost blowouts by this government, and we want to know how much of that has gone to organised crime via the syndicates that they have effectively endorsed.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I ask you not to use a point of order to make a statement to the house.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, on the point of order, I was going to make the same point. The Leader of the Opposition should know that he is not to use a point of order to either make a statement or re-ask the question.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I was referring to, whether they be government construction worksites or indeed all construction worksites across this state, workers on these sites deserving the best of union representation. They work in difficult and dangerous conditions. They do not deserve the sorts of elements of the rotten culture that has been exposed that we are working with the federal government to crack down on and in support of Victoria Police.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a further point of order, Speaker, they do not deserve unions that have been infiltrated by organised crime. On relevance, I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to the very narrow question about taxpayer money going to organised crime on government worksites.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Evelyn, I ask you to be succinct in your points of order.

**Ben Carroll:** On the point of order, Speaker, I seek your advice. Page 132, *Rulings from the Chair*:

**If points of order are out of order.** Where a member disregards that continuously, the Speaker or Deputy Speaker may suspend the member from the chamber under SO 124.

That was a ruling by Speaker Smith back in 2013. I seek your advice on the constant disruptions that are coming from the member for Evelyn.

**The SPEAKER:** A point of order is not an opportunity to ask the Chair about their rulings. You can come and see me in my office if you wish to address that. Member for Evelyn, I ask you not to raise any further frivolous points of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I was making this point because I will not have good, hardworking union members being demonised by those opposite. They deserve the best of union representation.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, in her answer the Premier must be factual when she is answering. We are not talking about the workers on the site; we are talking about the ones that get \$11,000 a week for not showing up to work.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Eureka can leave the chamber for an hour and a half.

**Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.**

**The SPEAKER:** It is not for the Chair to determine whether a member is being factual. There is an expectation that members are factual.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Like the member for Hawthorn, I was at work last week. We were working hard.

**Brad Battin** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Go on. Go and say that outside.

**The SPEAKER:** The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I was making the point about workers on worksites because we know that those opposite would not have any workers on government worksites, because they do not believe in investing in the projects that we are supporting right now across this state.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is making baseless accusations and using her time to attack the opposition. I would ask you to ask the Premier to desist from doing so.

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

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:40): Will the Premier now order a royal commission, or is the Premier going to remain silent as taxpayer money continues to be funnelled into organised crime here in Victoria?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:40): I think I have proved the second part of the Leader of the Opposition’s question to be a false claim. I most certainly have not remained silent. I have outlined to the house today and I have outlined over the course of this week and over the course of the past year the actions that we have taken. In terms of the claims around a royal commission, let us be clear: there was a royal commission in this country, and it resulted in five failed criminal prosecutions despite two years of work. I am more focused on taking action now – not going on leave, not going on holidays and not telling anyone about it, taking action now.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very narrow: will the Premier order a royal commission?

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. The Premier has concluded her answer.

#### Ministers statements: Smile Squad

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:41): I rise to update the house on cost-of-living relief that is being delivered by the Allan Labor government through our Smile Squad program. Our \$321 million Smile Squad is the biggest single investment ever made in preventative health care in this state. The bright orange vans are continuing to deliver free dental care to public school students right across the state. This includes students from Boronia Heights Primary School. I had the pleasure of visiting that school on Monday with the member for Bayswater, and we met local mum of four Sarah and her delightful little boy Bailey and we talked about the way in which Smile Squad is not only delivering cost-of-living relief but also saving time travelling. As a mum of four, Sarah knows and very much appreciates what the Allan Labor government is delivering for her.

Smile Squad has already visited 870 Victorian government schools, and we know that dental conditions are the leading cause of preventable hospital admissions for children under 10. That is why we will continue to invest in Smile Squad. But we know Smile Squad, as I said, is not just good for children’s health but also good for the hip pockets of families, some of whom are doing it tough at this time, saving on average around \$400 for every child. To put it another way, that is half the price of a ticket on a cruise from Brisbane to Airlie Beach and back. While those on the other side are discovering that getting the truth –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, thanks to former Speaker Brooks, ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition. Perhaps the minister might like to tell us how long the public dental waiting list is.

**The SPEAKER:** I did not hear the minister attacking the opposition, but I do remind the minister that it is not appropriate to attack the opposition in a ministers statement.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I might add that while those on the other side are discovering that getting their leader to tell the truth is harder than pulling teeth, those of us on this side of the house are investing in children’s teeth.

**Danny O’Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, you just heard the member for Evelyn’s point of order about not attacking the opposition.

**The SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**Danny O'Brien:** You said that they had not, and the minister at the table just went to that.

**The SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**Danny O'Brien:** I am repeating the point of order of the member for Evelyn.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has concluded her ministers statement.

*Constituency questions*

**Eildon electorate**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (14:45): (1050) I have a question for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. What impact will the Yan Yean Road upgrade ultimately have on the Hurstbridge township? Local residents in Hurstbridge, Nutfield, Wattle Glen, Arthurs Creek and Doreen are concerned the stage 2 Yan Yean Road development known as option B, scheduled to begin later this year, will funnel traffic from the busy Yan Yean Road into quiet Hurstbridge via Doctors Gully Road. Hurstbridge is a small town of about 3500 people with a single-lane bridge and windy, single-lane country roads. I expect the government has done some modelling to determine the impact, and I would appreciate that modelling being shared. Residents are concerned that the extra traffic from Yan Yean Road, which carries about 24,000 vehicles a day, will impact greatly on the small community, including its shops, homes, roads and facilities.

**Narre Warren South electorate**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (14:46): (1051) My constituency question is for the Minister for Women and concerns the Safe Workplaces for Women initiative. Minister, how will this initiative support women in my electorate of Narre Warren South to feel safe and respected at work? Women still face discrimination in the workplace. Our Labor government is leading the country on gender equality and equity, but we acknowledge that there is still work to do. Many women still feel vulnerable to being taken advantage of physically, mentally and financially while at work, even after decades of the women's rights movement. Employers and employees by law must work together to ensure that women have equal access, opportunity and security for a good, well-paying and safe job. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

**Lowan electorate**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:47): (1052) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services on behalf of businesses impacted by the Grampians bushfires and national park closures over the summer. My question is: why are Grampians businesses only eligible for \$5000 in disaster relief when the New South Wales and Queensland governments have successfully lobbied for \$50,000 in business support for each of their businesses impacted by recent effects of Tropical Cyclone Alfred? For my region it has now been over three months since the fires first began. Our businesses have lost the cream of their season. They are financially absolutely up against the wall, and some businesses have already closed. Any support would be appreciated, but \$5000 that was only delivered a week or so ago simply does not touch the sides. I urge the government to respond to this question in the affirmative and deliver the funding.

**Bass electorate**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (14:48): (1053) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and it relates to the recent coastal erosion mitigation funding for hotspot areas across the state, including the repair of Evans Inlet seawall in Tooradin. What emergency works are currently planned to protect the foreshore in Tooradin with the approaching Easter tides? I want to thank Marg Lenders, Ross Wilkie and all the members of the Tooradin Foreshore Committee of Management for the work they do, their advocacy and activism. They remain very concerned about the erosion of the bank between the fish-cleaning tables and the small beach, and with this and the upcoming Easter high tides they

already have the funds and capacity to put sandbags in place with the help of the local SES and community groups. They also seek timing and clarification of whether the seawall works announced form part of the *Casey Coastal Framework* strategy, a larger piece of work which outlines substantial inundation and erosion risks for the Tooradin community now and into the future. I look forward to relaying this information.

#### **Caulfield electorate**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:49): (1054) My question is to the Premier. Premier, when will the government provide urgent funding for Chabad Youth to rebuild the Little Desert Nature Lodge? The lodge was destroyed by bushfire in January. It has long served as a key venue for Chabad Youth camps and retreats, providing vital space for leadership development and resilience programs for at-risk youth, many from low-income families. In light of recent events, particularly the 7 October attacks on Israel, the Jewish community has faced heightened antisemitism, and these young kids need a retreat, need a place, now more than ever. This particular facility is important particularly for these kids because there are certain cultural elements of camps that can only be provided at a purpose-built campsite. We request the government urgently provide this funding. When will the government provide this support? We know that the member for Lowan has been a strong advocate, but we want the government to stand up and support this.

#### **Tarneit electorate**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (14:50): (1055) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, how will the distribution of kinder kits positively impact young families in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing? With a growing number of young families across my electorate, this could not be a better time to introduce a helping hand to families in need. In Tarneit we have more than 10,000 families, with over 6000 little Victorians eager to head to their very first day of kinder. The Allan Labor government has already introduced free kinder across Victoria and has also now introduced another round of kinder kits, which include local books written by Australian authors, a variety of educational tools and finally a guide to navigate a whole new world on their own. As a dad myself, I know just how hard it is to watch your little ones head off to their first day of kinder, but I am confident in the fact that these kits will make not only their transition easier but their experience stress free. Kinder kits aim to support young Australians in every aspect.

#### **South Barwon electorate**

**Darren CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (14:51): (1056) My constituency question is to the Premier. The Armstrong Creek growth corridor is regional Australia's fastest growing growth corridor. Over the last decade its population has doubled, and in the decade to come that population will double again. Premier, will the new fire services levy help fund the election commitment made by former Premier Daniel Andrews in 2018 to deliver a new career fire station to service this community, which is growing so rapidly?

#### **Bayswater electorate**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (14:52): (1057) Knox is the home of basketball in this great country and in the state of Victoria in the heart of my electorate in Wantirna South, and I am very proud that the state government delivered, in partnership with Knox council, the new State Basketball Centre redevelopment. My question is to the minister for sport: how many people approximately have walked through the doors of the redeveloped State Basketball Centre, the home of basketball in Australia, since we officially opened the redevelopment last year? We of course have seen a new town square created, 12 new community courts, new high-intensity complex training facilities and a new gymnastics hub, as well as new facilities for the NBL and WNBL teams there. It really has got everything. I am very, very proud of all of the stakeholders there, including our very own Knox Basketball, and I look forward to the minister's response.

**Benambra electorate**

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (14:52): (1058) My question is to the Minister for Environment. The information I seek is: when will the minister return staff for the maintenance of the Tallangatta Valley electrified wild dog exclusion fence? The minister's department and this government are all about non-lethal control methods, and here you have one in the Tallangatta Valley which is about 75 kilometres long that has been switched off because this government do not have the staff to maintain it. This fence protects livestock from wild dogs. This barrier was maintained by a Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action staffer last year when wild dogs in the north-east was a hot topic. I understand that person has since been redeployed. The government's own figures from DEECA's invasive species program show a 30 per cent increase in livestock either killed or maimed and a 53 per cent increase in the number of wild dogs seen and heard. Locals say it is a direct reflection of the fence being taken out of action.

**Pascoe Vale electorate**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:53): (1059) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. How can the Department of Transport and Planning, VicRoads, Victoria Police and Merri-bek council work together to help make the Bell Street, Elm Grove and Urquhart Street corridor safer for the families of Coburg Primary School? On 18 February the school council president Jacob Kantor and the vice-president Emma Burrows wrote to me to raise concerns in relation to road safety. The school's split system situation over both sides of the extremely busy Bell Street corridor creates unique challenges, with students required to cross several dangerous intersections, particularly on Bell Street, multiple times a day. Recent incidents have highlighted the critical nature of these safety concerns, and the school continues to witness far too many near misses, with vehicles regularly running red lights and speeding through school zones. The situation is particularly concerning given over 50 per cent of students walk or cycle to school and teaching staff must personally escort students between the campuses during the school hours. With Bell Street carrying over 44,000 commuters daily and 25 crashes recorded since 2018 resulting in 30 injuries, I strongly support the school's call for a comprehensive safety review of the area, provision of appropriate state and local government resourcing for safety improvements and consideration of additional measures along the corridor.

**Bills****Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Melissa Horne:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**And Danny O'Brien's amendment:**

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government:

- (1) provides evidence that its reforms will reduce gambling harm;
- (2) evaluates and reports on the feasibility of new technology such as facial recognition technology and automated risk monitoring systems;
- (3) delivers a process to protect border clubs from financial drift to interstate clubs; and
- (4) improves parliamentary oversight of the reforms.'

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:55): It is good to be up again on my feet so quickly. As I was saying yesterday, research by the Alliance for Gambling Reform and Roy Morgan, which surveyed 16,000 Australians, released in July 2024 shows that problem or moderate gamblers who make up just 12.7 per cent of those who gamble make up almost half of gambling revenue – that is, 48.5 per cent; 56 per cent of problem gamblers suffer from mental health concerns, and that is 21 per

cent more likely than the Australian average; 41 per cent suffer from anxiety – that is 20 per cent more likely than the average Australian; and 37 per cent of problem gamblers agree with the statement ‘I often feel my debt levels are out of control,’ which is 65 per cent more likely than the average Australian. Speaking from personal experience, I can very much attest to the firsthand impacts that gambling harm can have on the wellbeing of households, families and young people, having very much grown up in a household that experienced the significant brunt of gambling harm and what it means for young people and children and their upbringing, which is a story I will share at a later date.

In this respect I very much welcome the bill that is currently before the chamber, which is all about designing a set of reforms that are responding to gambling harm to support vulnerable households and people. On 16 July 2023 the former Premier announced Australia’s most significant package of gambling reforms, with the focus of the reforms making provision for how and when people gamble and making sure patrons have adequate protections when they sit down at an electronic gaming machine – an EGM – at their local club or hotel. That is why we have continued to lead the nation through the previous reforms we have committed to and progressed, which have included the establishment of the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission – the VGCCC, Australia’s strongest gambling regulator with enhanced oversight and enforcement powers – and mandatory carded play for pokies at Crown, ensuring players track and manage their gambling. We have also committed to reducing load limits on EGMs from \$1000 down to \$100, which this bill before us will make provision for, and to strengthening existing money laundering standards and ensuring responsible gambling practices. Venue operators must then verify and identify before paying out credits of \$2000 or more. And of course we have introduced the mandatory closure periods, where since 30 August 2024 all hotels and clubs must close gaming areas between 4 am and 10 am to reduce extended gambling sessions. Of course these are previous reforms, much of which we will continue to build on through the bill before the house.

This bill establishes those necessary legislative and regulatory frameworks to support the phased implementation of mandatory carded play and precommitment on EGMs in Victoria. Specifically the bill will ensure that all new gaming machines installed in a gaming venue after 1 December 2025 have a spin rate of at least 3 seconds. That is a 40 per cent increase on the current rate of 2.14 seconds. This will help slow the rate at which people are gambling on EGMs to help provide that additional breathing space for people to moderate and temper their behaviour. It will also require player cards to meet requirements set out in regulations and prohibit venue operators from issuing a player card without first verifying the player’s identity. It will enable the minister to direct the loyalty scheme provider or venue operator to provide loyalty scheme information to the minister or to the VGCCC. It will enable the minister to direct the monitor to ensure a person may not play on a gaming machine without a player account. It will prohibit a venue operator from allowing someone to play a gaming machine without using a player card where a direction to the monitor is in place. It will also expand the existing regulation, making powers so requirements may be prescribed for precommitment and carded play. The bill also amends the Casino Control Act 1991 to ensure that all gaming machines installed at the casino after 1 December 2025 have a spin rate of at least 3 seconds. And of course there are a quite a number of other reforms, regulations and provisions in this bill that help give effect to these very important new measures.

Full implementation is expected by August 2027 and will require a player to abide by their loss limit by that stage. Once the loss limit is reached, players will be prevented from using a gaming machine until their limit period resets. The bill is based on very extensive community consultation across various parts of the sectors that are impacted, and it is also supported by a number of stakeholders, including the Alliance for Gambling Reform, with the CEO of the alliance Martin Thomas emailing all of us yesterday and saying:

Evidence shows that mandatory carded play with pre-commitment is the gold standard for reducing gambling harm from poker machines. As a result of the Royal Commission this was implemented at Crown from December 2024 and this legislation supports the remaining venues in Victoria with EGM’s to have the same system for patrons.

The losses to poker machines in Victoria in 2023/24 were \$3.03b, the highest on record.

The Alliance strongly supports and applauds Victoria's decision to support mandatory carded play ...

which is a sensible measure. And of course, with Australians spending more on gambling per capita than comparable countries, we must continue taking that action to reduce the impacts of gambling harm.

Across my community, we have 12 local venues with EGMs – pokies – a total of 639 local EGMs, and in 2023–24 over \$61.4 million was lost through these machines collectively. That equates to \$5 million per month or around \$356 per person. These include the Abruzzo Club, with 55 machines, \$1.8 million; Browns Corner Hotel, 35 machines, \$5.3 million; Courthouse Hotel in Brunswick, \$419,000; the Drums Hotel in Coburg with 75 machines, \$9.4 million; Duke of Edinburgh, 50 machines, \$7 million; Fawkner RSL, 33 machines, \$1.1 million; First & Last Hotel, 64 machines, \$10.7 million; Glenroy RSL, 40 machines, \$6 million; Lyndhurst Club Hotel, \$2.3 million; Moreland Hotel, 70 machines, \$7.2 million; Northcote Park football club, 85 machines, \$3.4 million; Pascoe Vale RSL, 47 machines, \$2.3 million; Pascoe Vale Taverner Hotel, 42 machines, \$5.5 million; the Reggio Calabria Club, \$721,000; and the Brunswick Club with 43 machines, \$1.1 million.

As I cited earlier in this debate, all of these clubs play an important role in employing local people, providing a great meal or a social night out for families, and make a great contribution by donating to many local sporting community clubs. However, we need to ensure through the measures contained in this bill that we continue to do all we can to mitigate, and support people at risk of, gambling harm. In that respect, I just want to acknowledge the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. He came out to visit my electorate and a couple of these pubs and clubs back in February. We visited the Drums Hotel and met with local long-time publican Stuart Steele. The pub was established way back in 1875, just opposite Pentridge prison, and still continues to provide a great environment for local families to have a good meal out.

There is also across Merri-bek the *Gambling in Moreland 2015–2020* strategy, which breaks down how local people do spend their gaming revenue or income. Fifty-three per cent of local households report gambling on TattsLotto or scratchies, 26 per cent gamble on horseracing, 23 per cent gamble via poker machines and 8 per cent on sports betting, which I am sure has increased since this report was first introduced. Of those who gamble on poker machines, individuals reported accessing poker machines across multiple locations, including 47 per cent at hotels, 42 per cent at RSLs, 25 per cent at the casino and 22 per cent at sporting clubs. Sports gambling was most likely to be accessed online – 53 per cent – followed by a local hotel. It is in that respect that I commend this bill to the chamber. It is all about helping build a better, safer, more resilient community.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (15:03): I am pleased to rise today to talk on the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024. I always like following the member for Pascoe Vale, but normally he gives us a bit of a history lesson. I thought we would have got a history lesson on how Ned Kelly used to gamble in Coburg jail or something like that. He goes back a long way, the member for Pascoe Vale. He does give us a good history lesson normally when he talks. I am pleased to talk on this today.

From the outset, I will say I am not a gambler. I am really not. I hate the pokies.

**A member:** Want to bet?

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Well played. I hate the pokies, I really do. They are a pretty depressing place most of the time. You walk through there and you see people sitting there mesmerised by the machines, hitting the button, hitting the button, hitting the button. There is no conversation; there is no real social interaction. But although that is my personal point of view, I do not take away and I would never take away someone's right to gamble.

The member for Pascoe Vale touched on it in his contribution, and it is also here in the reasoned amendment put forward by our shadow minister, the member for Gippsland South, and I thank him for the work he did on this bill. On the reasoned amendment, the first point – ‘provides evidence that its reforms will reduce gambling harm’ – is a very, very good point. I think everyone in this chamber probably knows a problem gambler. I do; I know quite a few.

I think a really important part about this is that the government provides evidence that its reforms will reduce gambling harm. It is really, really quite an important point, because unfortunately when we walk into these venues we do see a lot of people in our lower socio-economic demographic in these pubs and clubs playing pokies. They are probably, a lot of the time, the people that can least afford to gamble. I think what we really do need to do is around education and reducing harm of gambling. That to me is a prudent, responsible thing that any government should do. They really should. I mean, reducing the spin rates is a good thing, but I do not know if it is going to go far enough. I do not know if this bill and this proposal will actually solve the issue.

I am happy to be corrected if I am wrong, but I think it was the Penrith Rugby League club that introduced something like this. They had about 25,000 members. Of those 25,000 members, 250 members took it up, and of that only about 25 people actually signed up to the whole process. So it sort of seems it has already been done and it has not worked. Sometimes we should, as government and us collectively in this place, look to other jurisdictions and see what they have done, what has worked and what has not worked. I do not think this will work. I think what this actually may do is it may push more people, say, into the black market gambling space, the not-quite-legal space, the online area where there is no regulation behind it. People could probably end up losing a lot more money, because this could be too problematic for them.

But I can see an issue too when we are talking about border venues, when we are talking about border towns. What you might find is that people on the Victorian side may venture over to the New South Wales side because their laws are possibly more relaxed and there is no restriction there. I think these are things we need to consider when we are doing this bill. You know, it is meant to be rolled out across 40 pubs and clubs and in testing by mid-2025. I just do not know if we have got the balance right on this. I know I am being a little bit critical, but I can see problems with this. I suppose in many senses my description of this is like a Myki for pokie machines at the end of the day. You have got to upload onto a card and do it that way.

I just do not know if we are addressing the real issue here with gamblers and gambling, and that is to provide mental health support. We should be looking at other avenues to get people, especially people that are addicted to gambling, out of that cycle, out of that thrill. I can see what will happen here if things become too difficult in this space: we will find that the percentage of people on Sportsbet will probably rise. So there are all these other things around this that I do not think are that proactive, hence the shadow minister put through the reasoned amendment.

The Victorian Liberals and Nationals are committed to reducing gambling harm. When we were previously in government we had the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, and unfortunately the government abolished that foundation. I am not sure why they did that. Obviously I was not here in this chamber at that point in time. I do not know the motivation behind it, but obviously when we were in government we had a system set up to help curb gambling harm. It is a massive problem in our community. I will not deny that. We see it quite often. I would not know the mindset of the government at the time or why they would actually abolish something like that. There could be a very, very good reason behind it.

Operators have raised some concerns, especially around how the data and the security may be used. We know people are very, very – what is the right word I am looking for – sceptical about their privacy nowadays and data being used and on sold. That is a fair concern. I do not think a lot of people realise the companies do sell data. Hopefully the government is going to address this concern.

**Michaela Settle** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Probably right too. I am not disagreeing with you, member for Eureka. I am just saying that people have concerns around this space, they really do, so hopefully the government will put something in place with that.

To me it just does not go far enough. I am always concerned about gambling. I am concerned about the effects it has on households when you see people putting money into the machines but their kids are not clothed properly or not fed properly. I am not saying this is everyone that gambles, obviously, but there is a cohort that that happens to. I would like to see more support for gambling reform, more support for gambling addiction. These are the reforms that I will support every day of the week, because at the end of the day when people are struggling – and the member for Pascoe Vale did touch on it too, that quite a few gamblers have mental health concerns, and I do not think gambling helps those concerns. I think this is the area where we need to be investing, I really do.

This may work; it may not work. We do not know. I think there should be a review of this in a certain amount of time. I am just not convinced that this will work. I can just see people moving to other avenues of gambling. If they are gambling in a venue, I suppose that creates tax revenue. We know that. We also know that a lot of these venues give back to their communities. There is a regulation there that the venue – a pokies club or one of those types of venues – actually has to give a certain amount back in community grants. If we start to push people away from those venues to venues that are not regulated, that do not increase tax revenue, then those community grants might actually lower, those thresholds might lower. I just sat down with one of the clubs in my area last week and did those community grants, and I think it was to the tune of about \$60,000 that they were giving back into the various community organisations, like they are regulated to do.

I am not going to go for much longer on this. I do not feel as though this will resolve the issues we have in Victoria. I am sitting here thinking it may work, it may not work. I do not know; I do not have a crystal ball. But I think we really need to put more into gambling education, gambling reform, as in education – just help gamblers out, is what I am saying. I am going to leave my contribution there.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (15:13): It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to rise and make a contribution in favour of the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024. Before I get into my substantive contribution, we have heard several contributions from several members now, and I would just like to acknowledge all of them, particularly those that told their personal stories and particularly the member for Eureka. It is important to share lived experiences when it comes to issues such as these, when it comes to significant social issues such as these. I am most certainly not anti-gambling. I do not like pokie machines, but I am not anti-gambling. I think I used one of my first contributions in this place to explain what a market margin is and how to calculate it. But when it comes to issues such as these, sharing lived experiences is important to give everybody the context that they need, but it is also important to illustrate that there is a personal cost to this, to problem gambling, that is not just paid by the person with the problem but paid by their families and their loved ones. I did not think it was appropriate to start this contribution without acknowledging that.

As I said, I am not anti-gambling, but pokie machines do gripe me. They seem to be disproportionately situated in areas with people who can least afford them, and they seem to disproportionately target poor and vulnerable people. In my electorate I have four large venues, a significant amount of machines and a significant amount of losses accrued. Tarneit–Hoppers Crossing is part of the mortgage belt in the west, and it is a community that has felt disproportionately the effects of rising prices and rising interest rates over the past couple of years. The west is not in isolation with that, but my community has felt those effects disproportionately compared to some other parts of the state. Yet in the 2023–24 financial year there was still \$125 million of losses on these machines throughout the Wyndham LGA – \$125 million in one year, \$2.4 million per week. It is why, with respect, I do not support the reasoned amendment, because the reasoned amendment essentially tells us to stop debating

this bill whilst this week \$2.4 million is lost on these machines in the area of Wyndham. It will be \$2.4 million next week and the week after, and the longer that we wait on this, the more pain that is caused through problem gambling in places like Hoppers Crossing and Tarneit.

The member for Narracan said that this piece of legislation does not fix the whole thing. Well, no, it does not. Apart from completely banning gambling – we still support people’s right to engage in the activity in a responsible way – there is no big stick, there is no quick fix to this issue. It is incremental changes that allow people in moments of clarity to have choice over the decisions they make and how they spend their money whilst gambling, and that is what this does.

Problem gambling goes far beyond the frustration of losing, and it goes far beyond finances, profit and loss. There is now empirical evidence, significant evidence, that problem gambling and that gambling losses cause a number of significant social issues in the family home and in the community. It is not a coincidence that on particular days when there are particular events when there is a lot of gambling turnover, as well as the high consumption of alcohol, that domestic violence goes up. That is not a coincidence. Problem gambling and gambling losses exacerbate a number of social issues, and that family violence piece is one of them. So if we can do anything in this space to help regulate and to help people have greater control over how much they spend and over how much they bet, that is an incredibly positive thing and one that we should be doing with haste. Once again, with respect, because I understand there are some stakeholders in those regional seats and those border communities in particular, I think that this is urgent enough for us to push through with it. I would hope that those in the other place agree with that notion.

This piece of legislation has got a couple of key features, one of which is account-based play which essentially requires patrons to insert a player card with information on their gambling habits and opt-in preset limits to operate a gaming machine. The member for Narracan spoke about the fact that it is an opt-in system. We are a liberal democracy, we are a free state, and I think all the evidence shows that just simply telling somebody ‘You can’t do this’ will make some people want to do it more. I think giving people the capacity in moments of clarity, perhaps in discussions with their family, to make smart decisions around their gambling choices and to set those limits is an incredibly positive step forward.

We have seen corporate bookmakers in this space do this for a long time. Every time you set up with a corporate bookmaker – and you know, to be honest, I have probably got about eight of them on my phone – and you make your initial deposit, they prompt you to set a bet limit. I do not think it is just with your initial deposit; I think just about every time I open the app they prompt me to set a bet limit. They cannot force you to, but that is what they do. Corporate bookmakers have been doing this in this space for some time, because there is evidence that it works. It does not work for everybody, and there are lots of different ways that we have to tackle this, but it makes a difference.

We unfortunately have not seen operators of these venues follow that lead on their own, so we are introducing and debating legislation that will make sure that they do and will make sure that they are acting in the best interests of their patrons but also the community that they are in first and foremost. What it also does is adjust the spin rate. It adjusts the spin rate I think to longer than 3 seconds, whereas it is currently at 2.14. Obviously a slower spin rate means less time slapping the button and less money spent.

These are not silver bullets. These will not fix gambling harm in isolation, but they are part of the settings that we have to create here in Victoria to encourage responsible gambling as much as we possibly can. As I said, to problem gambling there is a human cost that is paid. This is here to help fix it, and I commend it to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (15:23): I rise to make a contribution on the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024. I think that everybody that has stood up in the chamber to speak on this – and it has been great either sitting in here or watching and listening

via the television in my office – is touched in some way by gambling, whether it is a personal account of family members that have been involved or it is friends or associates that have trouble when it comes to gambling. We need to do anything we can do in the space around gambling to support those people, who are normally the ones that can least afford to be losing money gambling, whether it be via poker machines in venues, at a casino or at a racetrack. We need to make sure that we are putting the best possible bill forward to help them out.

A lot of us can have a punt or walk into a poker machine venue and put a couple of dollars through if we feel like doing that, and that is the end of it, but there are some that gravitate towards a gambling lifestyle. As a former president of a football club, in my playing days we did not know back then but we used to see signs of people that gambled in their mood swings and how they were back in the day when I was playing. When I first came in, mobile phones were limited. Not everybody had one, and to be able to –

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Martin CAMERON:** You would not believe it, member for Frankston, that is right, but it was limited, so you had to actually be at the TAB or at a pub to have a bet. But you could still tell the people that were gambling by the way they would be happy one minute and sad the next, and that is because they were betting on horses or gambling as such, and that was it.

These days, still being involved with the football club, every single person – whether it be football or netball – has a device, a mobile phone, in their pocket. It is amazing how times have changed. You walk into the clubroom and the kids that are 16 or 17 years of age are talking about football, and the part that they are talking about is putting an exotic bet on. They are going to load up and have five different people that are going to get a certain amount of possessions and the first person that is going to kick a goal and they are able to bet on it. That culture that is in our community of a gambling lifestyle is at the forefront no matter where you go, especially being able to carry something around in your pocket that enables everybody to be part of it.

The bill here to change some laws particularly around poker machines establishes a framework for the introduction of mandatory carded play and a precommitment for electronic gaming machines. We all go out for tea, whether it be at an RSL or a bowling club or a pub that does have poker machines in the venue, and we see people in there playing. We also see families out enjoying the other benefits of these establishments, so we need to still give people the right to be able to have a gamble if they want to responsibly, but we also need to make sure that we are doing everything possible with gambling laws to cater for the ones that really struggle in this space.

An interesting one here is Crown Casino. I did read here that when they went through this they experienced a significant downturn after the introduction of mandatory carded play there, and soon after that they cut around a thousand jobs. Crown Casino can probably to an extent absorb those losses, but when we go into regional Victoria and we are talking about our pubs and clubs and our publicans that are responsibly running gambling venues we need to make sure that we are not pushing this on them if it is going to cost them staff members that they have to let go. So there is still some framework around it.

I notice the member for Gippsland South did have a sensible reasoned amendment that he put forward which I think strengthens this piece of legislation and provides a little bit more certainty for everybody, because there is a little bit of guesswork in this legislation. Talking with venue holders in the regional communities, they do do a lot for our community in general. That is not the only reason why we should be making gambling requirements to look after everybody in our community, but they do support our sporting clubs and they do support our Cubs and Scouts by providing funds and venues for them. I think it is said in here that in the pilot program there could be around about a 30 per cent downturn.

I think the government do need to support trials as we go ahead, but if they come out to regional Victoria, where numbers are smaller, and they do not get the turnover they do here in inner-city

Melbourne, we may need to provide support for our venues and licensees. The last thing we need in rolling out this trial is to cause more trouble in our communities and for our licensed venue holders, who, as I said before, do a great job. We have venues in the Latrobe Valley and throughout Gippsland that provide meals for underprivileged people. They have cheap nights when they can come in and eat either for nothing or for a very minimal amount of money. And they also do support a lot of our other workers that provide meals for nothing. So we need to make sure that we are not going to upset that from continuing by pushing the trial on. I think we do need the trial. We do need to see how this is going to work. But as I said, I think we do really need these amendments to go along and push through with it.

As I said before, I am involved in a community group, and my community group of choice is a football and netball club. Others will have other community groups that they do support full time. As MPs we are in a very privileged situation where we get to go around an incredible amount of services that actually rely on their patrons to help out. Especially in a football–netball club – and I do not want to pigeonhole them – you can actually pick people’s mood swings right across the board, whether they have been in a licenced venue, where we are trying to make amendments, or whether they are gambling online. I think the online area is the gravest concern. When people are going out, they are able to be not controlled but looked after in these licensed venues. But we do not want to push them so they are not leaving the house and they are spending all their time gambling unmonitored and unfiltered on their phone.

A gambling amendment is a good thing, I think, but we need to make sure that we do get it right. We need to make sure we get it right. Too often we are looking at legislation in this chamber that we do not get right. So I support fully the amendments from the member for Gippsland South, and hopefully the government will take these under consideration.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (15:33): I too rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024. This bill is really important. It builds upon our government’s work to go ahead and tackle and reduce gambling harm in our community. This is something I know my electorate of Laverton is very, very passionate about. I applaud the work done by local councils in my electorate – it does not happen very often that I will applaud the councils – in particular Wyndham and Brimbank city councils in advocating for these changes.

It is communities like mine that suffer the most from gambling, and I am going to give you some statistics here. In the City of Brimbank, which takes in Sunshine, Albion, Ardeer and Sunshine West in my electorate, gambling losses since July last year amounted to more than \$103 million. These are the highest gambling losses in the state. If you come on over to Sunshine, Albion, Ardeer and Sunshine West, they are great places with great communities. But what you will notice is they do not strike you as particularly wealthy communities. They are communities that have suffered systemic economic disadvantage for many, many generations. They are great communities to live in and raise your kids, but you do have to stop and ask yourself why these communities have plugged \$103 million into the gambling industry since July last year. On top of that \$103 million, in Wyndham, which takes in Truganina and Williams Landing in my electorate, it amounted to \$77 million and ranked seventh in gambling losses. Now add up how much, in less than a year, has been accounted for in gambling losses in these suburbs alone in my electorate and think about what you could build for \$180 million in losses. You could build a train station; you could build Truganina train station. In less than one year you could build a train station. You could go ahead and help fund schools. You could build sporting grounds with that kind of money, but this money has been plugged into certain facilities in my local community across these suburbs. The suburbs I have read out – one, two, three, four, five, six suburbs – have helped contribute to these kinds of losses. This is outstanding.

We talk about clubs having gambling, our sporting clubs having poker machines and needing them to survive and things like that. I think it is really important in this place to point out how much is actually going into the gambling industry and into these machines, particularly at these big gambling venues, which quite frankly are an absolute eyesore in my local community. I think it is appalling if they are

backing in local sporting clubs. I do not want to see generations of the next round of children in these suburbs in clubs or major gaming facilities in my local electorate. I am not going to say who it is in particular, but every time I drive past – and they are very close to local sporting grounds – it always amazes me that they seem to have some kind of outdoor playground facilities that help draw people there and keep them there. These are not people going in for just a meal and a bit of a punt on a pokie; these are people who really go in with not much money. They may get a cheap meal, but they are there for a long time and they lose a hell of a lot of money. These two LGAs, Wyndham and Brimbank, are similar in nature: middle and outer suburban areas facing a lot of disadvantage which are recording tens of millions of dollars in gambling losses.

We have seen tremendous progress in this space, which is something that this government should be proud of, and we are proud of it. But I think members on this side of the house know we need to go even further. We have set up the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, the strongest gambling regulator in Australia, with enhanced oversight and enforcement powers. We have set up mandatory carded play for pokies at Crown Casino, ensuring that players can track and manage their gambling as the night goes on. Since August last year we have successfully had mandatory closing times, and I was particularly happy to see this. I would have liked it to have gone even further. Since August last year we have successfully had those mandatory closing times, between 4 am and 10 am, preventing the practice of bussing gamblers from one venue to the next to get around closure periods. These are all really important changes, and they are delivering benefits for folks living in my community in Melbourne's west, and I know that because I go and talk to the services and the agencies that then have to deal with the problem gamblers and the addictions to things like gambling and having to deal with their families and the fallout that is going on in their lives.

There is always a lot more to do, and that is what this bill is about today. It should be clear from our government's position that we want to ensure that gambling venues can continue to operate and thrive, and we want to make sure that community clubs, RSLs and hospitality venues can continue to remain an important part of Victorian social life. Whether you like it or not, there are some people that do like going to these clubs, and they have a right to go to these clubs. I understand that these venues are important for a lot of folks in our communities, and they are important for folks in my communities both as a source of local jobs and also for entertainment and for social engagement, where folks can go to catch up with family and friends.

My nanna, all those years ago – rest her soul, she has passed away now – loved going down to the local RSL, and with whatever money she had left in her pension I think she used to make 5-cent bets on the pokies. She really enjoyed doing it; it was something she did for a long time. She went deaf when she was 60 and faced isolation in her life after my grandfather died, and being picked up by the community bus and taken to the RSL, getting a cheap meal and being able to sit in front of a poker machine did get her out of her home. Would we have said that that was the best way she could spend her time? I would say no; the family did not agree with that, but that kept Nanna happy and she enjoyed doing it. But what we know is that we want the gambling experience to be safe, and my nanna was not a problem gambler – she was someone, though, on a pension and who had no money.

But what we want is that the gaming experience needs to be safe, and that is really tricky. It is really tricky with legislative reform; it is really tricky around talking to the services that are dealing with the fallout in people's lives from problem gambling and trying to unpick their addiction to gambling. We need to ensure that patrons remain in control of their gaming and their spending. The effects of what happens when they lose control we know are incredibly devastating in our community. I just talked about my nanna loving to have a little punt; her brother, who passed away many years before her – I do not remember him, Uncle Les – was a gambling addict; he was an alcoholic. He had had his marriage split up and was I think a physically abusive partner to both his wife and his children and then his partner, and gambling played a really big part in his life. That is just one example of how devastating it can be and what happens when people lose control and become gambling addicts and are also addicted to alcohol and other substances. Uncontrolled gambling addiction is the kind of

scourge that destroys relationships and families and ruins lives and livelihoods, and that is something that our government keeps in mind time and time again whilst also trying to balance the right of all Victorians to be able to go and have a punt, go to the RSL, go to the local club and get a meal. We do that; I do that and enjoy that time.

In the short time I have got left I would like to give a big shout-out to the previous minister. When you talk to the member for Williamstown about her views on gambling and gambling harm reduction in this state it is something she takes incredibly seriously and feels very passionately about, and that was about protecting folks mostly in electorates like hers in the electorate of Williamstown and electorates like mine, folks in the western suburbs, from having their gambling become out of control and ruining lives; she knew exactly what it did. I attended the services and organisations that provided assistance and support to gambling addicts and their families, so I do commend her on the power of work that she has done. This bill is finally before the house, and I commend it to the house.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (15:43): I rise today to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024, a bill which proposes significant changes to the way electronic gaming machines, known as EGMs, are regulated in Victoria. Specifically, the bill introduces mandatory carded play, precommitment systems and new minimum spin rates for EGMs among other amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. While the intent of these reforms is to address gambling harm, something that is incredibly necessary – no denying that – there are still some concerns, and many others have already raised them, about the bill’s effectiveness.

I want to be clear about the purpose of the bill. The government’s plan is to introduce mandatory carded play and precommitment requirements for every player using EGMs. It means no person will be able to engage with gaming machines without first signing up for a card system, which will require them to provide personal ID. This might sound a straightforward way to address gambling harm, but it does raise some concerns. The government’s position outlined in the second-reading speech is that the reform is about standardising the process, as if it were simply an extension of the voluntary card system already in place, but it is important to acknowledge that this is not standardising, it is making it compulsory. The bill does not leave room for choice; it mandates that all players must have a registered card to play, a policy which will inevitably infringe upon personal freedoms and could lead to unintended consequences. The government’s announcement of these reforms took several by surprise. Anti-gambling groups have long campaigned for reform, but the scale and suddenness of this change along with the potential impact on industry have raised concerns.

Venues, particularly pubs and clubs, which have only just begun their 20-year licences are now faced with significant regulatory challenges. This could create what is known as sovereign risk. You have heard about it – a risk of government action undermining contracts already in place. The introduction of mandatory carded play will be trialled in about 40 venues in mid-2025, but the government has not outlined how it will recruit venues or provide compensation for losses that these businesses are likely to incur. What happens if the pilot fails? Why should these venues bear the brunt of the government’s decision to introduce such a sweeping reform?

Looking beyond the pilot, the bill also proposes to introduce a minimum spin rate of 3 seconds for new EGMs, which is an increase from the current rate of 2.14 seconds. Some may see this as a sensible step to slow the pace of play, but it is worth noting that the technology being used is outdated. Magnetic stripe cards, which were developed in the 1960s, are still being proposed for this system, even as consumers are moving towards more modern contactless payment systems, and you cannot argue with that. The technology we are using is not keeping up with the times, and there is no clear plan for how this will be addressed. What is more, the bill does allow for regulations that will affect key aspects of these reforms, such as time limits, loss limits and the collection of data. Regulations are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny, which raises concerns about transparency and accountability. The government should not be allowed to make sweeping changes behind closed doors without input from the public or proper oversight by Parliament.

One of the most concerning aspects of the bill is the incredible lack of consultation, but we are not surprised by that. The government has failed to adequately consult with key stakeholders, including the industry and, importantly, communities that will be affected by the changes. Pubs, clubs and the people who rely on them for employment and community support will bear the financial consequences of these reforms. I might add that industry representatives have warned that they could see a drop in revenue of up to 30 per cent, with job losses and a reduction in funding for local sports and community groups. This is a real, tangible cost for communities across Victoria.

The evidence for the effectiveness of mandatory carded play in reducing gambling harm is not as clear-cut as the government would have us believe. While there is certainly data showing the impact of problem gambling, the statistics show that gambling participation has decreased significantly over the past decade. In 2008, 22 per cent of Victorians played poker machines. In 2023 that number was down to 11 per cent. The majority of people who experience gambling harm do not fit the stereotype of a compulsive gambler. In fact the report cited that the government indicates that most people who play poker machines do so without issue and that the highest rates of problem gambling are seen in other forms of gambling like bingo and Keno. Experts like Professor Charles Livingstone of Monash University say that regular reminders of gambling limits could help prevent people from exceeding their intended play time. Many may choose to take their gambling online, which is also concerning, where monitoring is far more difficult and the harms less visible. There are concerns about the impact of these reforms on border venues as well, which you have heard, and the bill does not provide any certainty that Victorians will not simply cross the border into other states like New South Wales or Tassie, where the restrictions do not apply.

I believe we all share the goal of reducing gambling harm without question. The evidence suggests that the bill may not achieve the objective in the most effective way. There are alternative approaches such as facial recognition technology and automated risk-monitoring systems that could be more effective and less intrusive. For these reasons, the Liberal and National Party cannot support this bill in its current form.

In my little bit of remaining time I want to say thank you to the generous donations of the Kilmore Racing Club and the Seymour Club, who have been able to provide young people in my electorate with a scholarship to walk the Kokoda Track. They have invested more than \$6500 to the Kokoda scholarship providing funding for year 11 students in the Euroa electorate to walk the Kokoda Track and follow in the footsteps of local war heroes from the 39th and 14th battalions. The scholarship was presented for the first time in 2024, providing Euroa Secondary College student Amber McNally and St Mary's College Seymour student Chloe Butterworth with the opportunity to successfully complete the trek. The scholarship is something I am so privileged to be a part of. Trekking the Kokoda Track is a life-changing experience, and I am grateful that we are able to support incredible young people in our community with the necessary funding to participate. With the scholarship, we are hoping to encourage young people to research and understand the sacrifices made by so many ordinary people during wartime, including residents from our local communities. While on the trek students will have the opportunity to learn and visit iconic sites from the war and pay respects at the graves of locals who gave their lives during the war. The recipients of this year's scholarship have been confirmed: Flynn Mosley of Australian Christian College Benalla and Felix Wallace Muskovic of St Mary's College Seymour. Congratulations, boys. We are so proud of you.

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (15:51): I rise to speak in favour of the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024, and from the outset I would like to thank the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in the other place and his team for their efforts in bringing this important piece of legislation to this house. I trust that these changes will make a positive impact for Victorians. I would also like to take note of the excellent contribution from the member for Eureka. Each time that she gets up and speaks on these changes that we make with regard to gambling she lets us see into the harms that gambling has wreaked on her family, and I am very

happy that she can share that with the rest of Victorians and us here in the chamber, giving us insight into these problems that we are actually trying to deal with with this bill here today.

This government is serious about reducing gambling harm, and we are proud to build on our legacy of taking strong and decisive action to protect Victorians. In July 2023 the then Premier, alongside the then Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, introduced significant reforms to minimise the impacts of gambling on our community. The numbers presented in that media release unfortunately continue to paint a clear picture of the harm that gambling causes for so many. It was stated that an estimated 330,000 Victorians experience harm as a result of gambling each year, costing Victorians around \$7 billion annually and leading to significant financial distress, mental health concerns and relationship issues. Just recently the figures are that \$3.03 billion has been lost on electronic gaming machines themselves. That is why it continues to be an imperative that we step up to protect Victorians.

This Labor government introduced the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, an independent, strong and fair regulator of Victoria's gambling industry. This commission operates to ensure that gambling operators act in good faith and take the necessary measures to minimise gambling harm. It also seeks to keep criminal influences away from the gambling industry as well as stopping those vulnerable to gambling harm from being unfairly targeted and exploited. By establishing the VGCCC we have made a bold statement that the gambling industry will be regulated strongly, with enhanced oversight and management, and that those who engage in wrongful behaviour will be held accountable. We have also identified that the introduction of carded play at Crown Casino on electronic gaming machines, also known as poker machines, is a prudent measure to help protect players. Carded play means that users can keep track of just how much they are gambling with and, quite frankly, how much money they are losing.

Twenty-two years ago I had the experience of working in Crown. As a uni student I worked in the hospitality industry serving drinks to the punters in that venue. We had good working conditions, but I did see in front of my eyes the harm and the dangers associated with electronic gaming machines and gambling in general. Back then it was more like the wild west. You did not have to be carded, and you were not being tracked in what sort of gambling you were doing. I am very happy that Crown has already introduced carded play, and I did pop down there to have a look to see, and it seems a simple and an easy process. On the concerns that have been raised by the other side about it being problematic, it was very easy for them to show me what they do to sign up. These changes stand alongside the mandatory closure period of 4 am to 10 am for gaming areas in all Victorian hotels and clubs, which came into effect on 30 August last year. This again is another measure to help stop users from losing control and to keep track of time. There were reports of many of the venues staggering their opening hours so that a punter could move from one venue to the other. This ensures that all venues are closed from 4 am to 10 am.

This bill progresses the Allan Labor government's remaining commitments to addressing the risks and harms related to gambling. As technology advances, this opens up a potential to use this as an opportunity to further protect gamblers while simultaneously presenting a risk that gambling may become even more perverse and harmful. Account-based play regulations mean that in order to operate a gambling machine a patron must insert a player card into the machine. This personal card gives players information about their gambling habits and history as well as giving them an opportunity to set limits on how much they are willing to lose. This process is also known as precommitment, an important measure which can balance personal choice and freedom with responsibility such that people can still have fun whilst maintaining the safeguard mechanism necessary such that the enjoyment does not turn into an addiction or intrusive habit. Furthermore, this bill will pave the way in reducing the spin rate of electronic gaming machines. A spin rate of 2.14 seconds, which is the current setting, means that for one round of a pokies game it takes the machine 2.14 seconds to complete the spin. By increasing the time of this spin rate to above 3 seconds we are slowing the play speed of games, thus slowing the rate gamblers can lose money on these machines. Researchers

indicated that faster play is correlated with higher stakes, longer periods of play and, on occasion, impaired self-control abilities when playing. It is critical that we take action to slow down the rate of play, and that is exactly what this bill intends to do.

We recognise that these reforms are broad ranging and complicated. As such, the implementation of these changes cannot be done in an instant, and we must take the necessary steps to ensure that they are effective and efficient. The new act will enable the new Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation to conduct pilots to learn from how it can be practically implemented. For example, across a three-month period around 40 venues across the state will be trialled for carded play. This process is crucial as we can assess the harm minimisation effectiveness of these policies through the pilot stage. This in-depth analysis will provide the flexibility to strengthen or make any changes that may be necessary. Victoria was the first state in Australia to introduce carded play and precommitment for electronic gaming machines. Another benefit of this is that it provides a further deterrent against money laundering by mandating the venue operators verify identity before cashing out wins of \$2000 or more. The evidence is overwhelming to support our changes. Although the proportion of the population which uses pokies is decreasing, the number of gamblers who face harm has increased. The Productivity Commission reported that almost 70 per cent of EGM users spend more than their limit, a shocking and worrying statistic which further elucidates the importance for change.

We also know that the legislative reform alone is not enough. Whilst we expect that most will follow the new rules and regulations, there are some bad-faith actors who try to circumvent the rule of law. That is why this bill created new offences to support the new reforms. Once it has been established an offence will be created to penalise venue operators who allow uncarded play or issue cards to someone whose identity has not been properly verified. Additionally, the minister will have the power to instruct a loyalty scheme provider or venue operator to supply information about the gambling habits of players and the implementation of the precommitment. Much like the aforementioned VGCCC, this is about providing oversight over whether users are being treated fairly and vulnerable users are not being preyed upon.

In drafting this bill the government established a community advisory committee, talked to people with lived experience of gambling harm and listened to working groups and advocates, so this bill also considers the role of community clubs, RSLs and hospitality venues in the state of our economy. They make contributions to grassroots sporting and other organisations and donate to charities as well as look after our veterans. I would like to give a shout-out to the team at the Waverley RSL: president Neil Slaughter; vice-president Geoff Dare OAM; secretary Grantley Woods; treasurer Ken Vickery; committee members Tim Day, Rhonda Reid, Rex Hirst, Brendan Mahon and Gary Brogden; welfare officer Filidea Di Bianco; and general manager Justin Cleverley. I would also like to thank the great team for the work that they do in the provision of welfare services to support former and serving members of the Australian Defence Force.

#### **Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

#### *Grievance debate*

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That grievances be noted.

#### **Crime**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (16:01): I grieve – with much support from the member for Frankston – for the state of Victoria and for the years when we have watched as the Allan Labor government has failed to keep our communities safe. We have seen the devastating consequences of weak bail laws, rising violent crime and a government that is completely beholden to corrupt and violent unions, like the CFMEU. The Allan Labor government has prioritised bikies and criminal gangs over public safety, and it is Victorians who are paying the price. Our bail law failures and rising crime are taking control of our state.

We have got a crime crisis here in Victoria. We have got cars stolen at a rate of one every 20 minutes, we have seen a 15 per cent increase in crime and there are 19 residential aggravated burglaries every day. Youth crime is out of control. Crimes committed by children aged 10 to 17 rose to their highest level since 2009, with more than 23,000 incidents, up by almost 17 per cent year on year. Youth offenders aged 14 to 17 are responsible for most child crime, with more than 20,000 incidents and a 20 per cent year on year increase. More than 10,000 knives, daggers and swords have been found by Victoria Police, roughly 40 a day, and retail theft has risen by 32 per cent. It is all because the Allan Labor government stripped Victoria Police of essential move-on powers, failed to tackle family violence effectively and allowed youth crime to spiral out of control.

The justice system is failing to hold repeat offenders accountable. This government weakened bail laws back in March 2024. This government caused this mess, and they are not the ones to clean it up. The government has failed to fill around 1000 vacancies at Victoria Police, and they have cut the community crime prevention budget by more than 46 per cent. This week the government introduced their so-called toughest bail laws in Australia for repeat serious offenders. The tough bail test is not in the bill that was passed. The Allan Labor government has failed to deliver on a promise they made, now saying that any change will be delayed for months. The offence of committing an indictable offence whilst on bail was reinstated, but it will have absolutely no impact on raising the test for bail. Previously a person charged with this offence faced an uplifted test to stay on bail. This was not in Labor's bill, and as I said, any change will be delayed. The offence of breaching bail conditions was reinstated but in a weakened form. Its contravention will not result in the offender facing a stronger bail test. Serious offences, including burglary and robbery, are not listed as schedule 1 or schedule 2 offences, meaning alleged offenders receive a presumption of bail and the weakest test to receive it.

This government has refused to reverse its cuts to Court Services Victoria, including a \$19.1 million cut this year and a \$58 million cut in 2027–28 that is upon us, which are contributing to trial delays and seeing more alleged offenders being offered bail. People under 18 years face no criminal sanction for breaching bail conditions, undermining the reason why bail conditions are imposed. In the last year, since Labor weakened bail laws, we have seen over 570,000 offences committed. In the last year, since Labor weakened bail laws, over 1500 offences have been committed every single day. In the year since Labor weakened bail laws, over 68,000 more offences were committed, and in the year since Labor weakened bail laws there have been 188 more offences committed every single day. Over the past decade under this government crime has surged by a staggering 28 per cent, with 2024 marking a significant escalation compared to the year ending September 2014.

We have all heard the youth bail stories in this state. A 15-year-old prolific car thief was released on his 55th count of bail – the teen has 208 police charges against him, including arson, car theft and violent assaults, among others. Despite concerns for public safety, the teen continually tells the police and judges what they want to hear and is subsequently released, only to reoffend days later. Or there is the 14-year-old with 380 charges, released on bail in June 2024. That individual participated in a string of crimes that were struck out due to the rule that 10- to 14-year olds cannot be held criminally responsible. Or there is Junchi Li, who was the offender in a brutal attack outside of a bar against his best friend, where Li repeatedly beat him, nearly killing him. Despite these charges, Li was released on bail until a yet to be determined appeal is heard.

We have seen the changes to the machete laws this week, and under Labor's weak laws the sale and distribution of machetes will be allowed to continue for another six months – a six-month amnesty giving a green light to criminals to stock up before a ban comes into place. Those on this side of the house, the Liberals and Nationals, want to restrict the sale of machetes immediately, prohibiting the sale of these weapons without appropriate exemptions. Furthermore, Labor's six-month delay in classifying machetes as prohibited weapons is unacceptable, and an amendment brought forward today by the Liberals and Nationals to move that date forward by three months to ensure we get machetes out of the community as soon as possible was voted down by the Allan Labor government.

For years this government has dragged its heels on machetes and knife crime, and that inaction must stop.

On this side we have a plan to get machetes off store shelves immediately and ban these deadly weapons forever. Every day machetes are available is another day a criminal can stock up on a deadly tool to terrorise and harm Victorians. We know that on this side we have introduced legislation on multiple occasions to try to fix this. Back in November 2023 we had a private members bill to amend the legislation to classify machetes as prohibited weapons – Labor opposed the bill. In February 2024 we had an amendment to the Firearms Act 1996 in the Assembly to reclassify machetes from controlled to prohibited weapons – Labor opposed this. On 21 March 2024 we moved an amendment in the Council to reclassify machetes from controlled to prohibited weapons. Each time we brought these forward, Labor stifled debate and would not listen to what the opposition had to say, and only under public pressure have they decided to actually take action.

We have this week seen reports of CFMEU corruption and this government being in the pocket of those corrupt unions. We have got a Premier whose inability to manage money and corruption on government projects has led to billions of taxpayer dollars being wasted on its rotten Big Build. They are exacerbating the housing crisis and underfunding essential services like health care and education, and the Premier's failures are directly linked to the cost-of-living crisis, with Victorians paying the price through higher taxes, rents and mortgages. There is the government mismanagement of major infrastructure projects, with cost blowouts exceeding more than \$50 billion. Labor's failures are deepening Victoria's financial crisis, with infrastructure priorities in growth areas neglected.

Back in 2022 the now Premier received credible allegations that CFMEU officials were engaging in violent conduct at Victorian worksites, but she did absolutely nothing. In July last year in relation to corruption on Big Build sites the Premier said:

I outlined the very strong action that the government is taking to stamp out this rotten culture at its roots ...

In July last year the opposition, those on this side of the house, tried to introduce a bill to this place to have police checks on government building sites, and it was the Allan Labor government who voted that down. We introduced it to protect hardworking men and women from the criminal elements of the CFMEU. How many women have been subjected to sexual harassment, bullying, intimidation or bashings since the government voted that bill down? This government has failed to protect women on CFMEU sites, and it is not good enough. There were members in this house who spoke at the time when we introduced that bill, and I quote the member for Bentleigh:

This is just a stunt. It is just a stunt because the opposition know the outcome of the vote we are about to take, because the government overwhelmingly has the numbers in this house.

So because of the numbers in this house the government voted down a bill that would have seen proper checks on those criminals on worksites, and we have seen the allegations this week. We have all seen the footage this week of women being bashed on government worksites because this government decided that they would put politics over the people of Victoria. We saw the member for Albert Park in this place say that we were issuing:

... wild and woolly accusations ... wild and woolly rant, plus all sorts of pretty scurrilous accusations ...

Wild and woolly accusations, she called them. Rather than flouncing about and making some pretty unfair and unwarranted accusations, when you look at what the member for Albert Park said last week you have to question: is it a stunt to see a woman getting bashed on national TV? Is it a wild and woolly rant that a woman was locked in a storage room with someone who was convicted of threats to kill and stalking of women?

**Nina Taylor** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Albert Park, you are not in your place.

**Sam GROTH:** Was that a wild and woolly accusation, member for Albert Park, or was that legitimate?

**Nina Taylor** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Albert Park!

**Sam GROTH:** You had the chance to stand up and defend it in this place.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Nepean will not respond to interjections and will make contributions through the Chair.

**Sam GROTH:** The member for Albert Park will have every opportunity to try to defend those words, but it was the member for Albert Park who said that in this chamber. I would encourage members in this house to go back and read the contribution in *Hansard* from the member for Narracan.

**Nina Taylor** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Albert Park, this is your last warning. You are not in your place.

**Sam GROTH:** He is someone who actually has experience in this sector and who has seen it firsthand. Read his contribution from that same day, on which the member for Albert Park and the member for Bentleigh made accusations that those on this side of the house were acting in the wrong way. Then nine months later we see what we have seen in the last couple of weeks or the last week on *60 Minutes*. It is completely unacceptable.

We also know the CFMEU donates straight to the Labor Party. So why are they not taking action when it comes to the conduct of the CFMEU? It is because the CFMEU are affiliate members of the Labor Party and they continually fund the campaigns that put this government into power. Would you take action if someone was funding your election campaigns? It is a fair question. The CFMEU received approximately \$34 million from Incolink last year. This money was meant to be for training and health and safety, but there is no oversight and no reporting on where that money is spent. The CFMEU does give a fair proportion of this money to the national branch, and in turn the national branch of the CFMEU returns that money to the Victorian Labor Party, and that is why this government does nothing about it when it comes to CFMEU behaviour or corruption on its worksites. This government is more than happy to take CFMEU members' money but does nothing to protect its workers. Nothing has been done for a decade and nothing will be done this week to support those Victorians who need this government to take action.

After 10 years of this Premier being a minister, being the Deputy Premier and being the Premier, the failures of Premier Allan continue to rack up day after day. Just in her time as Premier alone we have seen the Suburban Rail Loop blow out to \$216 billion, and you would question how much of that cost is because of the corruption, the payments to bikies and the payments to criminals involved with the CFMEU. We have seen her failure to take action against the corruption on building sites costing taxpayers billions in project overruns. We have seen youth crime surge – a 20 per cent rise in youth crime under this Premier alone. We have seen road maintenance budgets slashed, leaving 91 per cent of Victorian roads in poor condition. We saw them try and impose a health tax on GPs at a time when people are suffering and trying to get the health care that they deserve. We saw her as Deputy Premier and Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery not understand or not be transparent about a \$2 billion blowout to the cost of that event before she cancelled it at a more than \$600 million cost to the Victorian taxpayer. We saw massive infrastructure cost overruns with things like the West Gate Tunnel and the Metro Tunnel, projects once again with CFMEU workers onsite, with ghost shifts being paid for people who do not turn up to work – more than \$10,000 a week for those people who refuse to turn up to work while still being paid government money. It is unacceptable; it is not acceptable.

The Victorian people deserve better, but it is only those on this side of the house and a Battin-led Liberal and Nationals government who can fix Victoria's crisis. We will introduce a right-to-ask and a right-to-know scheme that gives Victorians access to police information about a partner's violent history to help prevent family violence. We will restore move-on powers for Victoria Police, we will outlaw machetes now, we will reinstate bail offence laws that give repeat offenders the consequences they deserve and we will ban bikies from government projects. I grieve for the people of Victoria under this government.

### Leader of the Opposition

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (16:16): Jeez, how am I going to follow that one? It is a tough act to follow. He really nailed us there. I grieve for Victoria and Victorians if they are led by a part-time Liberal leader who cares more about pre-planned holidays and boats than the safety of this community. I am talking about Boaty McBoatface, the member for the Coral Sea himself. I grieve for the day –

**Wayne Farnham**: On a point of order, Speaker, the member knows to refer to people by their correct titles.

**The SPEAKER**: Member for Tarneit, I ask you to refer to members, when you are referring to members, by their correct titles.

**Dylan WIGHT**: I was not necessarily referring to members, but sure. Thank you, Speaker. I grieve for Victorians, and I shudder to think of the day that they are represented by a part-time Liberal leader that cares more about going on cruises than he does about the safety of Victorians and the safety of our community.

In the last two weeks, since we were previously in this place, the Allan Labor government made a series of announcements to help keep Victorians safe. I have said in this place many times before that the number one priority of the Allan Labor government, the number one priority for me, is keeping the community safe. We made an announcement that we were going to introduce – and we have and passed it through the lower house – the toughest bail laws anywhere in Australia. We did so after listening to our community; we did so after consulting with Victoria Police. This week we have passed that legislation, making sure that people that do the wrong thing, that people that seek to cause harm to other Victorians, get the punishment that they deserve.

Last sitting week we made those announcements, and I sat there and I listened to them as we did our briefings and all of those things and I said, 'You know, the member for Berwick is going to be up and about this week. You know, the old member for Berwick – 'tough on crime' himself – is going to be really up and about,' so it was a great surprise that once we made these announcements there was radio silence. We did not hear anything from the member for Berwick. It was genuinely strange. We came to realise that it was not just us that did not know where the member for Berwick was; his own party room did not know where he was – bizarre. In normal circumstances the party room would sit there and go, 'Jeez, we can't find our leader.' We would have some sort of acting leader situation, and usually you would roll out the deputy leader. My assumption is that the narrative within the Liberal party room at the proposition of rolling out the deputy leader on this one would be something along the lines of, 'We'd better not let the member for Nepean start speaking, because then everyone will figure out how dense he really is' – absolutely bizarre.

Time went on, and the Liberal party room and we figured out that the member for Berwick was on a cruise through the Coral Sea. He was up at Airlie Beach – a beautiful part of the world, I must say. He was on a cruise, so he was not here representing Victorian people. He was not here representing his party room on an issue that he would consider his 1 wood. It is, I would have thought, pretty poor leadership. He was off doing that, and then he came back. He did not tell his party room. He told a lie that he was going to see his parents and actually ended up on a cruise.

I am not one to stand here and say that politicians should not take holidays. Nobody is going to sit here and say that, because that is utterly ridiculous. I will make the point that you had a pre-planned holiday, you have kind of changed jobs in that time and perhaps, after three months of being in the job, maybe cancel the holiday. But whatever, I am not his travel agent. This is not an issue of a politician taking a holiday. This is not an issue of a politician exercising poor judgement and taking holiday. This is an issue of integrity because when questioned about the issue the first inclination of the member for Berwick was to lie. That was his first inclination. It was a test of the integrity of the member for Berwick, and he failed it dismally. That is what this issue is about. It is not about holidays; it is about integrity, and we have learned over the last week or so that the member for Berwick has very little of it. He is tough on crime, but he is absent when we make our announcements about crime and cannot even respond to them. Nobody knows where he is. Then he gets caught out, and then he lies. This is an opportunity for the member for Berwick to show the Victorian people that he has some integrity.

**Matthew Guy:** On a point of order, Speaker, you have previously ruled on the use of the word 'lie' directly in relation to members, particularly when levelled against members of the government, particularly the Premier. You yourself have ruled on the use of that term being unparliamentary, and I am seeking your feedback or clarity on what the member is –

**The SPEAKER:** I do remember, yes, member for Bulleen. Member for Tarneit, I remind you about the use of unparliamentary language, including the use of the word 'lies'. I also remind members that the use of 'you' is a reflection on the Chair.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Indeed, Speaker. I can rephrase it: misled, was loose with the truth and showed not a skerrick of integrity. I walked into this place in very close proximity to the member for Bulleen on Tuesday morning, and from the response that he gave to the waiting media pack he was not thrilled about it himself. In fact we saw over a number of days several members of the Liberal party room briefing the media – the *Age*, the *Herald Sun* – about how displeased they were with their leader. In fact the member for Hawthorn was asked about it. Let us be quite honest, the member for Hawthorn, according to him anyway, did not take a holiday and worked really hard. When the member for Hawthorn was asked about this, he could not help but give a little jab back to the member for Berwick. When you have got your own party room briefing out against you consistently because of the lack of integrity that you have shown, you know that it is a problem. You know it is a problem, and it is a substantial one.

The member for Berwick was sunning himself on a cruise ship. I had a look at the cruise ship. It has got an indoor skydiving facility. It is pretty flash, pretty luxurious sort of stuff – the bogan from Berwick on a luxury cruise doing some indoor skydiving. Give me a break. I mean, it was the tan that gave it away. He came back from the cruise – 'Oh, no, I've just been crook for a few days, guys' – and he is tanned to the nines. Whilst he was doing that the Allan Labor government was getting on with keeping the community safe and getting machetes off our streets because they are dangerous weapons that have no place in our outer suburbs. I know through consultation, because we were around to be able to undertake consultation – we were not on a cruise and then lying about it – that these are incredibly important and popular reforms in my electorate of Tarneit and in Hoppers Crossing. So we were doing that.

What we were also doing was formulating and announcing the toughest bail laws anywhere in Australia, which will make sure that if you are somebody that is repeatedly doing the wrong thing in our communities – if you are somebody that is stealing cars or carjacking, if you are somebody that is invading homes to steal from working, ordinary families and if you are continuously doing that – then you will get the punishment that you deserve. You will be remanded, and you will no longer be in our community. These are some of the most important reforms that we have introduced into this Parliament in this term. They are designed to keep families safe – to keep people in the outer suburbs safe and to keep working families safe – because they are the real victims of crime here. Working families, working people and ordinary Victorians going about their day, trying to do the right thing,

trying to get ahead are the victims of this. By introducing these laws it is they that we stand with and it is they that we are trying to protect.

Let me reiterate this, because it is an incredibly important point. There has been a flurry of activity from the member for Berwick since he returned. He has been all over Twitter sharing things, sharing pages of the *Herald Sun*. Let me be clear and let me reiterate for the record that we can make jokes and call the member for Berwick 'Boaty McBoatface' – which I am not actually doing, but we could do that. We could make all those funny little quips, but this is a serious thing. This is not an issue of somebody going on a holiday. This is not an issue of somebody going on a cruise. This is a fundamental test of integrity and one that the member for Berwick has failed dismally. He has shown everybody in Victoria – not just in this place but everybody in Victoria that is taking notice – that he has no integrity. We all make mistakes, but when you make mistakes you front up, particularly to your party room or in my case the caucus. You front up and say, 'Look, it was probably the wrong thing to do. I should have cancelled it. Sorry. Let's move ahead.' You do not lie.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Tarneit, I have already cautioned you about the use of unparliamentary language.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Sorry, yes. You do not mislead your own party room, and indeed you do not mislead the people of Victoria. I would have thought it was probably one of the fundamental qualities that you should have whilst trying to ask the Victorian people for their vote.

In my electorate of Tarneit as we have been going and undertaking consultation on these new bail changes, and the machete laws as well, I have heard from families about their worries regarding a recent uptick in crime, whether that be an uptick statistically or at the very least a perceived increase in crime in our communities. To be clear, crime has not gone significantly up in Wyndham, but it has in some particular areas, and some particular areas that are incredibly concerning. That is why I am incredibly proud of the changes that we are making, but that is fundamentally why we are making them. Like I said, whether the stats are actually going up, the perception is or the perception has been that crime is going up significantly, and that makes people not feel safe. If you do not feel safe in your home at night, if you do not feel safe in your community during the day to be able to go out and spend time in your community with your family, then there is a problem, and there is a problem that needs to be responded to. That is exactly what we have done this week.

This week makes me incredibly proud to be a member of the Allan Labor government, because we can stand in here and say that what we are doing we are doing to keep our community safe, to keep Victorian families and ordinary Victorians safe. As I said, this is an incredibly proud week to be sitting in here or standing in here talking about the bail changes and the machete changes from the Allan Labor government, whilst I would think it is quite the opposite for the member for Berwick, who has shown every single Victorian and his own party room the lack of integrity that he has.

### Health system

**Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (16:31):** I rise today to grieve not just for the state of our healthcare system but for the very real and tragic experiences that many Victorians are living through due to this government's failures. This government has spent years pushing forward the narrative that everything is fine, that the system is functioning well, that any issues we see are simply growing pains of an improving system. Nothing could be further from the truth. We talk about statistics, we talk about delays and we talk about the failures –

**Belinda Wilson:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member seems to be reading from her notes.

**The SPEAKER:** Is the member for Euroa reading from notes?

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** I am referring to notes.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Euroa is referring to notes.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** We talk about statistics, we talk about delays and we talk about the failures of a broken healthcare system, but nothing can bring home the sheer horror of it all like a personal experience. I want you to imagine that you need to call for an ambulance for someone that you love. Imagine calling for an ambulance that does not arrive or takes several minutes or several hours to get to you. Imagine holding that person in your arms while you wait, like so many Victorians have to do on a daily basis – wait. We lived this recently, and I do not wish this upon anyone.

My beautiful, courageous *Frozen*-loving four-year-old daughter had a respiratory episode on Boxing Day. As a parent there is no worse feeling than seeing your child struggle to breathe. The sound of her wheezing was terrifying, and in that moment all I could think about was how fast we could get her the care she desperately needed. We did what any parent would do, and we rushed her to the nearest regional hospital hoping for competent and swift care. At the hospital she was diagnosed with asthma, and after 15 minutes we were told to go home. That is all the time it took for them to send us on our way with a diagnosis and no treatment, leaving us to go home trying to manage something we were told we could handle on our own. But deep down I felt uneasy. Something was not right, and as every parent knows, when you feel that sense of unease, you cannot ignore it. My husband and I called the virtual ED for a second opinion. The doctor on the other end of the phone immediately recognised that her condition was rapidly deteriorating and called for an ambulance. As we were still on the phone my daughter was struggling more and more to breathe. The doctor was clear: she needed adrenaline within 20 minutes. The doctor said that she needed help as soon as possible, and an ambulance was the best option.

Then came the waiting. Thirty minutes passed – 30 of the longest, most terrifying minutes of our lives. Every second felt like an eternity, and I have to say never have I hated this government more than in those terrifying 30 minutes. I hated the Allan Labor government's failure to provide adequate health care and the cost that Victorians pay for its negligence. I called the ambulance, and the call taker was blunt: 'We cannot tell you how long it will be, but if she stops breathing, please call again.' Can you imagine that? You can speak now. Can you imagine that? Holding your child in your arms and knowing that help could be hours away. The unthinkable thoughts come into your mind at that time when you are left waiting. You are left hoping, and let me tell you, everyone becomes religious in that moment and starts praying. We waited and my strong little girl waited, and 2 hours passed before the ambulance arrived – 2 hours when my daughter was struggling to breathe. We were discouraged from driving ourselves. We were told, 'Do not drive to the hospital.' So we waited 2 agonising hours like too many Victorians, and I am standing here today to tell you that I hope no-one in this chamber ever has to experience what my family and my little daughter went through. I hope none of you have to wait for an ambulance in the middle of a crisis, like too many Victorians right now. I hope you never have to hold your child in your arms, watching them gasp for air and waiting for an ambulance to come. I hope you never have to hear the words, 'If she stops breathing, please call back.' But this is the reality of Victoria right now. You want to talk about grieving – this is grieving.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I do not want to interrupt the member for Euroa, but I would ask you not to use the word 'you'. It is a reflection on the Chair.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** To the members on the other side: this is grieving. Too many families and too many children and too many parents are waiting for help that should be there, waiting for the care they are entitled to, and they are being told to wait even longer. This government has failed to prioritise the most basic need of our citizens – their health. The system is broken, and we have all experienced it firsthand.

I want to take a moment to reflect on the many headlines we have seen over the past year, the same headlines that continue to haunt us and the same stories of everyday Victorians battling for decent basic health care right now in Victoria. We read about the ambulances being delayed and hospitals overstretched and vital services stripped away. Let us not forget that these are not just statistics, these are stories. These are your loved ones, your family, your neighbours – these are Victorians. They are

people's lives; they are the lives of everyday Victorians who are being left to suffer because of this government's inaction and neglect and utter incompetence.

Ambulances are a prime example. Over the past two years we have seen the stories about our ambulance service in crisis. Today, again, we are confronted with the devastating reality that our ambulance fleet is stretched too thin. The headlines tell the story, and you are failing to listen in this government – ambulances 'delayed', 'sitting idle' and 'unavailable to respond to urgent calls'. The situation is so dire, and this is not a minor inconvenience, this is a matter of life and death. On Saturday night one-third of the metro ambulance fleet was out of action – one-third. This is what you should be grieving. And we are told time and time again –

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Euroa, I ask you not to use the word 'you'. It is a reflection on the Chair.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** The Allan Labor government should be grieving the neglect of their health system. We are told that the funding is being increased, that services are being expanded. How can that be true when so many of our ambulances are unavailable when we need them most? It is health gaslighting on an enormous scale, saying, 'Nothing to see here,' but you call an ambulance and no-one turns up. Ambulances being forced to operate with single-officer crews means they cannot even transport so many patients. What happens in an emergency when there is no-one to transport the patient? What happens when the system is so understaffed that it cannot even provide the basic level of care that Victorians deserve and expect and need?

In regions like Geelong not a single MICA paramedic was available over the weekend – hundreds of thousands of people, and not one MICA available. An urgent alert was issued to highlight the severity of the situation. It said to only contact 000 in a life-threatening situation as paramedics anticipated 'exceptionally high demand'. Exceptionally high demand, and yet a third of the metro ambulances are out of action – tell me this is not a health system in crisis. It is a crisis, and the Allan Labor government continues to sit back and hope that things will magically improve. Just what we have seen this week with the gaslighting about the bail laws and the machetes – you have ignored us for 18 months.

Back in 2022 the ambulance union identified shortcomings with the system and called for urgent action to address preventable deaths and harm from 000 delays. Safe staffing levels have been recommended since before COVID, and we still have the same issues happening today. Let us not forget about ambulance ramping, because if anyone has turned up to a hospital, they could see it every single day. It is far from resolved.

We have heard the government's promises before, but we continue to see delays, particularly in regional Victoria. At Albury Wodonga Health just a few weeks ago there was a tragic incident where a man lost his life after waiting 5 hours in a ramped ambulance – 5 hours. He got to the hospital and could not get the care he needed. That is who I grieve for – him and his family and everyone in that community that has to live without him in their life anymore. That is who we grieve for: Victorians. This is not an isolated incident. This is a new normal for far too many people right across the state and in particular in regional Victoria. This is not an inconvenience – I am sorry – it is life and death, and it is a worthwhile reason to grieve.

You need to hear the numbers – these are not just personal stories – because I think they speak loudly for themselves. Ambulance transfer performance for October–December 2024 is at 65 to 70 per cent, well below the 90 per cent target set by Labor. The government promised that they would fix the issue, but we are seeing the opposite. Victorians are getting used to these broken promises, though. The system is failing, and under the Allan Labor government it is regional Victorian patients who pay the price. It is all Victorian patients that pay the price. Instead of addressing the root cause, instead of properly resourcing our hospitals and ambulance services, the government has chosen to shift the blame. They have blamed hospitals, they have blamed staff, they have blamed anyone and anything

except themselves. This government has failed to act, and it is Victorians who suffer and are paying the price with their health.

I want to focus on the state of regional hospitals. In my electorate of Euroa ambulance response times have consistently failed to meet targets set by Ambulance Victoria. The target for code 1 incidents is for 85 per cent of ambulances to turn out within 15 minutes. In Strathbogie shire only 36 per cent of responses meet the target. Benalla, Mitchell shire and Bendigo have similar response targets and are dismally failing. When a life is on the line, 15 minutes is the difference between life and death – between having someone that you love in your life or not. This government continues to fail on this most basic service.

We have the issue of forced hospital amalgamations and the *Health Services Plan*. The so-called plan is a disaster. It will centralise health care, taking essential services away from our regional hospitals, and force people to travel great distances to access care. This is a blow to regional Victoria and the families who rely on our hospitals for their care. The government is pushing ahead with the plan, not listening – classic. It is ignoring the concerns of all Victorians. I have written to hospital CEOs in my electorate seeking clarity about the future of our health care services, and the response has been silence. The minister has gagged hospital leaders, refusing to allow them to speak out against these changes. It is a direct attack on local health care under the Allan Labor government's failure of leadership.

I grieve for many local mothers and healthcare professionals who are directly impacted by the loss of maternity services in regional Victoria. We have seen the closure of birthing services at Benalla Health, and Kilmore District Hospital is only operating during business hours. This is not an inconvenience, it is a risk to the health of mothers and babies. It is happening at a time when maternity services are needed now more than ever. And dental care in regional areas, including in my electorate, is so limited. There is a lack of public dentists and many towns are without fluoridated water, which leads to preventable dental outcomes. Children as young as nine are being admitted to hospitals for dental issues.

We are hearing about cuts to medical research. Today 14 research institutes are at risk of closure by 2028–29. It is a direct result of the government's failure to invest in the critical areas of health and research that can save lives and improve outcomes for Victorians. Today we hear of parents of sick newborns and women needing cancer treatment being moved out of the Royal Women's Hospital's free family accommodation, with the Allan Labor government selling the site to build new apartments. Six days notice is all that was provided, with no alternative space. Our health system is broken and I grieve for it. The government must be held accountable for its failures. No more delays, no more excuses. It is time for action, because Victorians are sick and tired of grieving for their loved ones.

### Leader of the Opposition

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (16:46): I rise to grieve for Victoria and for Victorians if they were ever to be led by a part-time Liberal opposition leader who prioritises holidays over community safety, a Leader of the Opposition who talks tough on crime but who is the first to bail for a holiday when the going gets tough, a Leader of the Opposition who talks tough in his party room over the December Christmas holiday break but then who is doing it tough on the deck of a windy cruise ship when it is time to unwrap the new bail laws and a Leader of the Opposition who simply has no plan, no vision and no depth. He is frankly out of his depth to be the leader of this great state. He is a Leader of the Opposition who is simply all talk, all show and all holidays but no action when it counts most and no action when it comes to community safety. The fact is the Leader of the Opposition simply does not have the right stuff to lead Victoria, and I grieve for all Victorians should we be unfortunate enough to ever be led by this part-time opposition leader. Because the fact is, while the Liberal leader was living it up on a cruise ship last week, this Victorian Labor government was announcing Australia's strongest bail laws. That is a fact.

It was his Liberal and National colleagues who are grieving over their leader being missing in action when they needed him most. As set out in today's *Herald Sun*, the opposition's favourite news outlet,

it has been reported that the opposition leader even failed to fully disclose his cruise ship holiday plans to shadow cabinet. A shadow cabinet source – I wonder who it is, by the way; will they rule themselves out as being the source? – said the opposition leader only told shadow cabinet that he had taken ‘planned leave to see his parents in Queensland’.

The source went on to say:

Today we read in your paper that he was on a four day cruise and more or less visited his parents on the way back to the airport.

There was no mention of a four day cruise at all.

It’s deceptive and selective at best. Not a good way to operate.

I quote a source from the opposition shadow cabinet, according to the *Herald Sun*. As set out by Shannon Deery in yesterday’s *Herald Sun*:

Furious Liberal colleagues have slammed the Opposition Leader ... for “an appalling lack of judgment”, dubbing it his “ScoMo moment” ...

a quote from a colleague again.

The story reports that the opposition leader was on the Royal Caribbean showcase *Quantum of the Seas* sailing to Airlie Beach. This of course left the poor old member for Malvern, the former opposition leader and Shadow Attorney-General, to front up to lead the opposition’s response to the state’s bail reform, and I respect and commend him for that.

The fact is this version of events was not incorrect, because in the same *Herald Sun* article today, what did the Leader of the Opposition himself admit? This is what the Leader of the Opposition said:

Was I upfront about it? No, lesson learnt.

And he went on to say, and I quote:

I did go on a cruise. I can’t deny that ... Now I’ve got to start to focus on what I’m supposed to do here in Victorian parliament.

Well, you would have thought that he would have been focusing on these important issues from day dot of being elected as the opposition leader way back in December.

But the other big mystery, the other big question I have as I grieve for Victorians about the opposition leader’s holiday and his approach to how he disclosed it or failed to disclose it is: why didn’t he tell his colleagues? And why didn’t he appoint an acting opposition leader during his leave of absence? The opposition have – and I have gone through the shadow cabinet ministry list – a Deputy Leader of the Coalition, who is the Leader of the Nationals, and they have got a Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who is the Liberal member for Nepean. So the opposition have two deputies to select as acting leaders, but the opposition leader chose none of them as the captain of his ship in his absence.

We know the member for Nepean would have been too busy sprucing it up at the Grand Prix – lapping it up at the Grand Prix – over the long weekend. But why not appoint the Leader of the Nationals as the acting coalition leader? He is more than capable, I would have thought, having been on PAEC, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, for so long, as he keeps reminding us all about. Good on him for doing so. Or why not appoint any one of the previously failed opposition leaders or opposition aspirants as acting leader? There is plenty of experience there. There is plenty of appetite there to take the job. As I said, you have the member for Malvern – he has effectively been the de facto opposition leader in the leader’s absence last week, as Shadow Attorney-General. You have got the member for Bulleen at the table there as well, as we keep reminding ourselves. He is also the Shadow Minister for Transition to Government, which was a job, mind you, he was supposed to do as opposition leader in 2014 and 2018. The prime job of any opposition leader is to transition the opposition from opposition to the government benches. He failed in 2014, he failed in 2018 and now he gets promoted, I would say, to the formal role of having to achieve that in 2026. Good luck.

There are plenty of other aspiring members there as well that could have fulfilled that role: the aspiring member for Kew; the member for Brighton, who I think I would like to describe as the Frank Underwood of the 60th Victorian Parliament; and the member for Caulfield, who would have taken such thorough notes, especially audially, while he was acting leader. He would have reported word for word what happened in the opposition leader's absence. And of course we have the member for Hawthorn, who quite easily could have stepped back into that role and probably should have, to be frank, after that performance, because just look at the words of the previous opposition leader, the member for Hawthorn. There is a really subtle but obvious dig at the current Leader of the Opposition in the papers today:

I didn't get a chance to take ... leave. I worked pretty hard but I'll let Brad handle that.

Doesn't that say it all? To his credit, the member for Hawthorn, I have got to say, worked bloody hard. For all the disagreements we had with him –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Pascoe Vale, I remind you about the use of unparliamentary language.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** The member for Hawthorn worked very hard. He worked very hard while he was opposition leader, when he was not being dragged through the Federal Court by his colleagues, with colleagues lining up to testify against him and the constant sniping and undermining and attacks, all to make his leadership totally untenable.

The member for Hawthorn and I, to be fair, do have some very fundamental philosophical differences. There is no doubt about that in terms of policy, the approach we take in terms of addressing the issues and pursuing the opportunities for this great state. But we do share an Italian cultural heritage, and we share a Calabrian cultural heritage as well, which we are both proud of. His work ethic is fantastic. I have seen him outside this place and inside this place. He is always working, and he is right – there he is. Here is the member for Hawthorn. The guy does not stop working. I can attest he has come out my way to many community events and he listens. He works with the community, and I have got to be fair to him: he shows up, he fronts up. He did not take a holiday in the whole time he was opposition leader, not one holiday, yet 10 weeks into this job the current opposition leader was the first to fly the coop – just absolutely outrageous. And to be treated with such disdain, the member for Hawthorn – it is an absolute disgrace on the Liberal Party to treat a member of Italian heritage in particular in that fashion.

We have also heard from the member for Nepean, who is out there aspiring himself as I grieve for the state, as I grieve for what a Liberal opposition government would mean. We have got an opposition totally focused on itself, including the current deputy leader of the coalition or opposition. I am not sure which one he is, but he told the *Herald Sun* on 5 July 2024:

“I want to be premier, yes,” ...

“I don't sit here in this place wanting to be the next Jeff Kennett, or the next Robert Menzies or the next John Howard. I want to be the first Sam Groth and do things my way ...

That is what he said. And the reality is the coalition party room is simply more divided than ever before. The reality is the opposition leader cannot even run his own party room. How can you trust him to lead this great state? With the opposition leader so focused on managing all these various Liberal Party internals, and Frank Underwood over there too, how can he possibly be focused on making our community safer? Holiday time is over, and the Leader of the Opposition should get back to work asap and support the bail and knife reforms that we currently have before this house. That is why I grieve for this state, because if a Battin Liberal government were to be elected, it would be one that is totally focused on itself, with no plan for the future.

We do not have to look that far ahead to imagine what a Battin Liberal government actually would look like and do. When previously asked who his political inspirations were, he named who else but Jeff Kennett. On 6 August 2024 – just go look at the opposition leader's Facebook – he described Jeff

Kennett as a fearless leader. This is the same Jeff Kennett, by the way, let us remind ourselves here, who sacked record numbers of frontline public service staff and sold record amounts of public-owned assets and land. We should never forget that he closed 354 schools across this state, 12 of which were in my community, which I have previously named – Oak Park, Coburg, Newlands, Hadfield Primary, Hadfield High, Fawkner Technical, Fawkner North Primary, Glenroy High, Coburg Technical, East Coburg Primary, Merlynston Primary, East Coburg Primary. He closed every single one of those schools. This is the opposition leader of today's political hero. Jeff Kennett is the same person who ripped \$1 billion out of education. He sacked 8000 teachers. He sacked 3500 nurses. He sold off the SEC, and again, all in the name of progressing the so-called 'Let's move Victoria forward' agenda.

The Shadow Cabinet Secretary, again, Joe McCracken, has already foreshadowed what will be happening in a future Liberal government. I will quote again:

We saw what Campbell Newman did in Queensland, he cut extremely, he probably had to, but he lasted for one term.

So I guess it's a really difficult balancing act of how much do you cut, what do you cut, what services can you live without, what services can't (you).

... it's going to have to be, I suspect, a wholesale audit of what's going on in government, where we can make efficiencies ...

Those are the conversations I think we're having first.

This is what Mr McCracken said. And we know that is code for more cuts to schools, cuts to education, cuts to health and cuts to frontline public services.

In very stark contrast, our record speaks for itself. We have been a government committed to safe and secure well-paid jobs. Where is the opposition's plan for well-paid jobs? Delivering the Education State – where is the opposition's plan for education in this state? We are delivering the big transport infrastructure build, record investments in our health and hospital systems, improving community and sporting facilities, delivering on new social justice reforms around family violence, mental health, women and gender equality and community safety. It is the Liberal opposition's approach to community safety that I particularly grieve about, because again, as the opposition leader was away on holidays we were moving those stronger bail laws. They need to get behind these reforms as soon as possible.

In addition to that, there are all the other measures that we have been progressing, which they have stood to the sidelines of. There is \$4.5 billion to support Victoria Police, with more frontline police officers sworn in in Victoria than any other state, with 3600 additional officers since 2014, including 180 extra officers across my community of Merri-bek. Of course the stronger bail laws that have been introduced will specifically call out serious crimes, including home invasion and aggravated burglary as examples of offences that present unacceptable risks for community safety. We have introduced those stronger laws to crack down on organised crime, outlaw motorcycle gangs, unexplained wealth, the illicit tobacco trade, illegal and dangerous weapons such as machetes, and again I cite the reforms that are before the Parliament at the moment, which I again call on the opposition to support as a matter of priority. We have also worked to support victims of crime, and we have continued to invest in all the things that are about tackling root causes of crime.

The Big Housing Build – where is the Liberal's policy when it comes to housing? You would never have seen a Liberal government turn around and announced a big housing build – never. It is not going to happen. Free TAFE – 83 TAFE courses to help some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged community members. This is a party that closed TAFE. They closed at least one TAFE campus in my electorate on The Avenue and The Grove during their last term in office. When would you see a party like that delivering on free TAFE and opening up new TAFEs? It would never happen.

We progressed those landmark royal commissions into family violence, mental health, historic sexual abuse, men's behaviour change and respectful women and children's programs. Again, when would

you see a Liberal government ever pursue any of those policy reforms? They never have and they never will.

But do not just take my word for it. Again I draw the house's attention to the article by James Campbell in the *Herald Sun* on 13 March 2025 – their favourite news outlet – where he says:

The Coalition's sudden need to exhibit a timeline of Liberal machete based policies illuminates how little they've had to do with –

the government's –

... decision to change ... bail laws.

The Leader of the Opposition's staff:

... felt the need at Thursday's press conference to hand out a timeline of all their ... initiatives since 2023.

What makes this even sadder is the people being given this – widely spaced – two-page reminder are the only people in Australia whose job is to keep an eye on what the opposition gets up to.

...

The sudden need to impress upon us how busy they've been is no great shock.

Because during months and months in which the *Herald Sun* had been drawing attention to ... the state's bail laws, the alternative government of Victoria has refused to tell us what they would be doing if they were in power.

That is why it was a bit rich for the Shadow Attorney-General and the Shadow Minister for Police to:

complain in a press release on Wednesday that despite the announcement the government had yet to release the legislation ...

Where's the detail? Where are the bills? If the government was serious ... they'd have legislation available today ...

As James Campbell accurately puts, and I do not often quote him, but he says:

Sorry mate but where's your homework?

Where is the homework of the Liberal opposition? Again, where is your homework on crime policy?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the Chair.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Where is the homework on jobs policy? Where is the homework on education policy, health policy and social justice policy? We as a party have a 121-page platform document which is our policy platform. The Liberals have a one-pager. Even the Contiki tour has a brochure that is 21 pages long.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Pascoe Vale knows better than to use props.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** It has all the fantastic European getaways, cruise holidays interstate, intrastate and overseas that the –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Pascoe Vale knows well not to use props. His time has expired.

### Government performance

**David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (17:01):** Well, what an absolute rant that was. What a rant that was. This is a government who have completely run out of ideas, so what are they doing? They are spending their time talking about us. I tell you what: what flattery that you have got a government that have got no ideas so they are going to spend their time talking about us. Let us just remind the government of this: after about 10 or 11 years of anything something starts to get a bit rotten; it gets rotten, and what do you do with something that is rotten? You get rid of it and you throw it out. I tell you what: this government has expired. It has expired, it is well overdue to be tossed out, and every

single Victorian is sick and tired of a government that is doing absolutely nothing, a government who have sat on their hands and done nothing.

You talk about someone that might take a holiday; well, as soon as anything gets a little bit tough and there is a bad announcement, the Premier is MIA, completely gone, missing in action. You only have to look at the last time the Wilson report came out on the corruption with the CFMEU, and what the Premier did was she quickly went out to Bendigo and did a local press conference and put the alert out 10 minutes before she did it, and then the media said, 'Well, hang on a minute, surely she's going to come into town and give a press conference, because this is her report.' This was commissioned to clean up the CFMEU, so of course the Premier is going to be up there holding and waving the report around and saying, 'How wonderful is this?' Guess what, the Premier was MIA, completely missing in action, and had nothing to say about her own report. Fast-forward to today, six months later or whenever it was: where are we now? The Premier is up, turning around and saying, 'We're going to get tough; we're going to clean up the mess. Isn't it terrible what bikies are doing? Isn't it terrible how women are being treated?' – on her own Big Build sites. 'Isn't it terrible?' Well, I tell you what: it is pretty terrible that the Premier had been given notice; had been told again and again about the corruption, about the women-bashing and about the types of criminal activity happening under her watch on her projects; and had commissioned a report that she could not stand behind; and then believes that Victorians are going to turn up and say, 'You know what, we've got full confidence that this is going to be cleaned up.' No-one has any confidence in this lot, no-one has any confidence in the Premier. This Premier is absolutely useless.

There is no accountability and no responsibility, and even just the other day, to just cap it off in terms of the CFMEU corruption – which I remind everybody with this Big Build and the \$50 billion worth of blowouts we are all paying for, mind you, we are all paying for that; the cost of crime is a financial one that we are all paying for – this government stood up and said, 'You know what, we're going to fix it because we've got an operation, Operation Hawk, that's going to deal with it. That will deal with it all. We'll clean this up, and Operation Hawk will fix the mess, and our police are going to get a taskforce, and away we go – a new taskforce, a new one, which we're all excited about.' And then what happened? The Premier had to get the acting Chief Commissioner of Police to clean up her mess and say, 'Well, you know what, it actually was a taskforce that was set up nine months ago, but it's going to be newish because we are going to give it a bit more whatever.' We are still waiting, mind you, to see what the 'new' is. It is another press release; that is what it is – no detail, complete spin. That is all this government knows, spinning its way out of trouble. It is like a car that is stuck in big gravel. It is just spin, spin, and they are all trying to push it out of trouble.

But we know now there are so many potential leaders that are lining up for the Premier's job because this government is incompetent. We have a Premier that is completely out of her depth, a Premier that had to apologise for the crime crisis that she created. She gets up in the media and says, 'You know what, I made a mistake. All of the mess is mine, but trust me now. We're going to have the toughest bail laws in the world. Trust me, we're going to have the toughest bail laws, and I know it because I'm going to call them that. Don't worry about the detail, but I'm going to call them the toughest bail laws, and people will believe me because everything that I do people believe.' Well, no-one believes a thing that this government does. They are useless, and the one with the top job is the one that commanded the problems in the first place.

This Premier has had big jobs. Talk about interviewing for a job. This Premier had two job interviews. Number one was major projects and infrastructure, off you go. The Premier for cutting ribbons – off we go, level crossing removal, hard hat, ribbon. This is fantastic. Another one: let us announce that we are about to do Metro, West Gate Tunnel and all these fantastic projects. Cut a ribbon – fantastic. And then all of a sudden they blow out. And then all of a sudden they have got corruption of bikies on these sites, and the Premier is hiding like it is not hers. And then all of a sudden it has escalated to \$50 billion worth of blowouts, and the Premier has still signed us up to the Suburban Rail Loop, and who knows where that is going to end up. Every single commentator, every single expert, has said this is a project

that Victoria cannot afford, but, no surprises, what has the Premier said? 'Double down and let's spend our way out of trouble.' You know what, when somebody says that and they are spending their way out of trouble, you know you are heading one way and it is straight for administration, straight for receivership, straight for liquidation. That is what this Premier is signing Victoria up for: a lifetime of corruption, a lifetime of bankruptcy. This is the government that could not manage anything at all. I tell you what, what this government need to do is introduce financial literacy programs into their party room to actually be able to add up, because this government could not count to 10.

**Juliana Addison** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Wendouree is warned.

**David SOUTHWICK:** While I am on that, they could not count to 10 because they cannot manage a project, and then when they try to manage a project all that happens is corruption. This government only knows one thing, and that is corruption. Let us just give you an example. In 2014 we saw the red shirts scandal. That is what we saw – a state election campaign, branch stacking, all involving the Premier, right involved in it, right in the heart of it. Then we had Operation Richmond in 2019, which reported investigating secret deals between the former Premier and the government and the United Firefighters Union – again, corruption. Then we saw Operation Turton in 2019 with Peter Marshall running the firefighters union involved in hacking emails and leaking confidential information. It all happened again with the Premier in the job right alongside former Premier Daniel Andrews. Then we had Operation Sandon in 2019–20 with allegations of serious corrupt conduct in relation to planning and property development decisions at the City of Casey council. Again, we were told the former Premier praised Woodman's donations to the Labor Party. This is a government that is now promising big housing and big developments. Where are the kickbacks going to come from all of that? Do we trust them with any of that? Is there going to be more corruption in some of this big high-rise precinct stuff? Where is that money going, one may ask? That is heading for another IBAC investigation quite possibly.

Then we have the Commonwealth Games. Hang on a minute, because I said the Premier had two job interviews. The first one was the Big Build. Well, I think everybody knows, including Nick McKenzie, that was the big corruption. What did he call it? The rotten big build, I think. In the last *60 Minutes* he called it the 'rotten Big Build', and then he was asked, 'Is Victoria completely ruled by bikie gangs and crime?' He said, 'Well, you know what, if you look at the Big Build, then unfortunately it is.' Who was responsible for it? Who signed off on the Big Build? The Premier. On the top of her resume is the Big Build. But we also have the Commonwealth Games, because the Premier got up and said this was going to be fantastic for regional Victoria. As a regional Victorian in Bendigo, we are going to provide all of this infrastructure to regional Victoria to ensure we have the Commonwealth Games. Well, we are still waiting for the infrastructure. I do not know where that is happening. But Glasgow got a big fat cheque as part of all of this.

**Juliana Addison:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Caulfield is misleading the house. If he followed my socials, he would have seen that we turned the sod on the Commonwealth Games projects in Ballarat –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Wendouree will resume her seat. That is not a point of order.

**Matthew Guy:** While we are doing points of order, the member for Wendouree is constantly hectoring the member while he is trying to speak. It is becoming really quite frustrating and annoying for all of us who are trying to listen. She is even hectoring now. I ask you, Deputy Speaker –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member has been warned and I am watching closely, thank you, member for Bulleen.

**Danny Pearson:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, we are not going to take lectures from the angry little man from Bulleen. He spends all his time yelling and hectoring whenever he is here.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Can everyone just take a little bit of a chill. I am going to rule on the point of order, because there was not one. The member for Wendouree has been warned and is very close to being removed from the chamber. I ask all members to listen to the member on his feet without assistance.

**David SOUTHWICK:** Again, when the government hears the truth, like the member for Wendouree has been hearing about her electorate – about the fact that it has been neglected by the member for Wendouree, that the major infrastructure has not been delivered by the member for Wendouree – the best way to cover up is to heckle, and that is what the member for Wendouree has been doing, interjecting and heckling because she is not standing up for her community. Regional Victoria has been let down because the Commonwealth Games were cancelled and we had to provide a big fat cheque for the cancellation. That is on the head of the Premier because it was the Premier's big job. Some members of Parliament in regional Victoria, including the member for Wendouree, did not stand up for their communities. They have failed. So the member for Wendouree can heckle as much as she likes, but come election time we will remind the people of Wendouree that the member for Wendouree has failed –

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Wendouree can leave the chamber for 30 minutes.

**Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.**

**David SOUTHWICK:** The member for Wendouree has failed Victorians and has failed her electorate. But let me get back to where we need to be here, because on top of all the corruption, which I mentioned, we had another allegation today of corruption with Victoria Police, and this is very, very serious. We have had a commissioner and a deputy commissioner taken out because they stood up to the government and provided important advice when it comes to crime and the crime crisis. I remind the house that every single government member has stood up and said how great they are doing with this crime crisis, on the bail laws, on the machete laws, which are our ideas. That is great. They can take our homework and try and improve it. It was not mentioned for six months. It was never mentioned at all. It was mentioned by the opposition and Victoria Police, and what have they done? They have criticised the opposition and they have sacked the two heads of Victoria Police. That is what this government has done, and that is why – unprecedented – a deputy commissioner today has referred the government to IBAC and the Ombudsman for political interference from the Minister for Police and the Premier and this government. This is unprecedented. Where there is smoke, there is fire.

*Members interjecting.*

**David SOUTHWICK:** The member for Essendon can jump up and down and rant as much as he likes, but this is a very, very serious allegation.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister is now warned.

**David SOUTHWICK:** This is a very, very serious allegation. I know the minister, the member for Essendon, is concerned because these are all serious investigations. The member for Essendon might be calling a 37-year veteran of Victoria Police a liar. At the end of the day, this is about a referral by someone that had spent 37 years, a lifetime of his career, in Victoria Police. The member for Essendon might call him a liar – that is fine – but there is an investigation –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before the point of order, the member for Caulfield knows that word is unparliamentary.

**Danny Pearson:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I did not refer to Mr Paterson as being a liar.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order; it is a matter for debate. The member to continue without unparliamentary words, please.

**David SOUTHWICK:** This is the most corrupt government that I think we have ever seen in the history of Victoria. It is a corrupt government. It is a government that has led us to a crime crisis, a cost-of-living crisis, a housing crisis and a health crisis. At every point we are in crisis. There is no way out. No matter where I go, no matter who I talk to, people are pleading in Victoria to get rid of a rotten, tired Labor government. They have had enough. They want to see the back end of this government, and they finally want to see confidence restored in this government, and that is what the Liberal–Nationals will do.

### Leader of the Opposition

**Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (17:16):** I grieve for Victoria and for Victorians if they were ever to be led by a part-time Liberal opposition leader who prioritises holidays over community safety. While the Liberal leader was living it up on a cruise last week, the Allan Labor government was announcing Australia's toughest bail laws ever. To me, this shows really poor leadership, but maybe they know that they have already got poor leadership and that is why they have had three leaders. Maybe there is number 4 on the way. Not a lot has changed from when they were last in government. They basically did nothing. They still do nothing except oppose everything and have no policy. They drifted through those four years delivering nothing. As a government they delivered nothing. I am going to go on a bit of a history lesson here.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Nepean and the member for Eureka can leave the chamber for half an hour and have a chat by themselves.

### Members for Nepean and Eureka withdrew from chamber.

**Chris COUZENS:** As I said, they drifted through four years in government delivering nothing. There is a bit of a history lesson here. They promised a new public hospital for Waurn Ponds, for example, but it was never delivered, because in fact what they did was give that significant funding to a private hospital which was built, so we never saw the public hospital that they promised. When the Liberals were in government, Avalon was in serious doubt. There were 250 jobs on the line. The Liberals would not support Avalon to get out of the difficulty they were in, and it meant that it was probably going to shut down. They refused any support. Luckily for those workers, we won the election in 2014 and we saved all of those jobs and in fact increased the number of jobs that are there now and got Avalon back on its feet. During their time in government there were no new schools, there were no new hospitals and there was no new infrastructure. There was basically nothing. They delivered nothing. I know in my electorate and the entire region and I know in other areas around the state it was exactly the same. They were not delivering anything.

In recent times those opposite have turned their back on First Peoples. They withdrew their bipartisan support for treaty, adding to the cultural load on First Peoples in this state. The negotiations on treaty, which are underway right now, have been a long journey – a journey over eight years. It was only after the result of the referendum that those opposite decided they were not going to support it anymore. But instead of actually sitting down and having a conversation or a yarn with First Peoples, they just announced in the media that they were no longer supporting treaty, that they were withdrawing their support. There was no decency or respect in sitting down with First Peoples to have that discussion; they just withdrew it.

Those opposite's behaviour during the pandemic, standing out the front generating hate and division in this state, was nothing more than disgusting. They stood out there on the front steps of Parliament spruiking misinformation, hate and division. What sort of leadership is that? Why would the people of Victoria accept that in any shape or form as any way of leading this state?

Now more than ever we must support and safeguard vulnerable members of our community and take steps to reduce divisive and harmful attitudes. The transgender community, particularly youth, face higher rates of abuse and traumatic stress compared to their peers. Traumatic stressors that youth face often include socially embedded forms of stigma, discrimination and marginalisation. What we are seeing and hearing from those opposite is a petition from Bev McArthur in the other place against the rainbow libraries toolkit. In May last year Brad Battin released a statement that said:

A Liberal Party I lead will never tolerate hateful and divisive rhetoric ...

Yet he rewards a member of his team who continues to exhibit divisive and hurtful behaviour with a shadow ministry position. The point about that is that that position will have oversight of local government, including our public libraries. Just as disappointing is the harmful reality that the Liberals have spread outright misinformation about the content of this resource and confirmed that they would scrap it if elected. This intolerance for supporting diversity has a long history. This is the same party that fought against Safe Schools, a program supporting young people and families to feel safe.

I also do want to point out that Bev McArthur in the other place was present at a recent book launch here at the Parliament where a book by Dianna Kenny was presented and discussed at length. The book opposes inclusion and questions the legitimacy of a person's gender identity. Her book opposes treatment and promotes divisive and harmful attitudes. What sort of leadership is that, where we are saying to transgender kids that this is not something that they can be part of. The fact that it was held here in the Parliament is concerning in itself. What sort of leadership is that. I continue to ask that question. This is not what the Victorian community expect of their leaders, I can tell you now.

Those opposite have generated a licence for hate, racism and division in this state and have continued to do that over a long period of time. They have no policy, they have no plans. Their plan is to cut services, things like what we have put in place. We compare that with what the Labor government has done and delivered. We have created the commissioner for LGBTQIA+ communities. We funded and built the Victorian Pride Centre. We developed the rainbow libraries toolkit and the funding of QHubs, which provide support to young people and their families. I know my experience with the Geelong QHub, and I know the Ballarat QHub is exactly the same. In talking to those parents and young people, they are so grateful to the government for having that service there. They rely on that service for the intensive support that they need, particularly the families, when they are dealing with their young people who in some cases are suicidal. To get that support has been really, really incredible for those families. We have also got the Victorian Rainbow Ready road map and so much more that we have done as a government. That is what good, strong leadership, equity and inclusive policies are all about. That is what state governments need to be delivering to their communities. What we see from those opposite is there is absolutely no way it is even on their agenda. They are not interested in those areas. But we do know that generally the community supports those programs and policies to protect those young people and to support those families that need it.

The work we have done to support our communities right across Victoria has really been unprecedented. The free kinder program is providing support to families, and it is providing support to those that may not have been able to afford to send their children to kinder. That is all there now – three- and four-year-old kinders. Women can go to work and have their children looked after at the kinder. Free TAFE has been extraordinary. I know the impact it has had on my community of Geelong, and not just for young people but many, many people in my community. They have been able to access free TAFE and now have a pathway to a career, which they never saw themselves having. Many in the community are coming from households where nobody has ever worked, nobody has ever had the education to be able to go on to a career path, and now they are seeing that happen in their own families.

It is making an enormous difference to them, to their siblings and to their children. It is making an enormous difference for them to actually look at having a career. I have spoken to many people who are doing free TAFE. Some are doing nursing, some are doing pathology – all sorts of different areas and career paths. They are just so excited that they have had that opportunity, and some have now gone into employment and are working as nurses, as pathologists or whatever they might have trained for. To me, that is what good government policy is. It is about seeing those results. And it is not just in my community; I know that is having an impact right across the state.

I think the work that we have done in women's health has been extraordinary. In my community we are in the process of building a women's and children's hospital, something that my community has really needed for a very long time, and this will help many parents. Those that have to travel to Melbourne on a regular basis will now be able to get that same service in Geelong without having to hit the road to get to the Royal Children's Hospital, for example. There are enormous benefits to that, and we are also looking at how we continue to make that an inclusive facility for everyone.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence made groundbreaking recommendations. We implemented every single one of those, and it has made such a significant difference. We know that the Orange Door, for example, have provided a fantastic service – anybody can walk in off the street and get that. There is Safe Steps. There are so many services that have come to light because of that royal commission, and this government implemented those recommendations of the royal commission. I spoke to many women who gave evidence to the commission, as well as those who did not, actually. I was getting emails from women saying, 'Thank God somebody is finally doing something about family violence,' and talking about their experiences. They said, 'This may not help me now, but as we go forward, it will help so many other women and girls.' That is something that I think we are all very proud of.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System was another significant reform that this government undertook. The mental health system was broken at the time. Not many governments are bold enough to stand up and say, 'We know our system is broken,' but that is exactly what we did, and we have implemented –

**A member:** It was broken.

**Chris COUZENS:** Yes, but it is not now. We have implemented so much. I know in my own community the drug and alcohol and mental health hub has now opened in Moorabool Street and is providing that direct service that people need. At a time when their mental health is not great, they can walk in off the street. That is a real game changer in my community, as are the youth mental health beds. At the moment people have to go to Melbourne to get their children that intensive support that they need. In Geelong we are building those beds, and they will be completed by the end of this year. So the royal commission into mental health is something that we should all be very proud of. Things like school breakfast programs, the school bonuses, the Big Housing Build, new hospitals – these are things that other governments have not done in the past. We have taken that step and made sure that we are providing every possible service to our community.

Those opposite cannot cherry-pick on equity and inclusion. That is not what good leadership is about. For those opposite to bang on about us over there during this debate, I would question a lot of what has been said on that side of the house. What we are able to do here on this side is stand up and recite all the different things that we have provided for this state, which is why we have been elected three times. And I am sure we will be elected again in 2026, because people recognise good leadership. They might not like a leader or they might not like some of the things that we do, but they respect a good leader, and that is what Victoria needs. So we need to continue to do what we do. What the opposition do is their business, but I think they are looking at a fourth leader at the moment.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the member for Eildon I would just like to acknowledge in the gallery Mr Philip Davis, former member for the Legislative Council for Gippsland Province and Eastern Victoria Region. Welcome.

### Government performance

**Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:31):** It is the people of Victoria that I am here to grieve for today, because they are the losers. In addressing what the member for Geelong said, everything I say is based on complete fact, not fabrications, because there are so many failures by the Labor government in Victoria and in fact it is Victorians who are the losers.

Even today I cannot believe how much attention they have put on the Leader of the Opposition rather than on governing, because I tell you what, there is an awful lot they need to do in governing. There is violence on worksites, there is violence against women on worksites, there are rorts and ghost shifts and we have got debt heading to almost \$200 billion. Compare that to a decade ago, when we had a debt of only about \$23 billion. That is one of the most criminal and extraordinary turnarounds that I have ever seen. Once we get a downgrading, if the ratings agencies downgrade us that little bit further, because it is one downgrade after another, the cost of our interest bill is just going to be crippling.

Already we see people living in the regions being short-changed big time by a government with a few favoured projects in the city. Whilst they might be favoured, they are not managing them very well at all, because the overruns are up to about \$50 billion. Imagine what you could do with \$50 billion. Imagine the new hospitals that could not just be built but be resourced. Imagine the roads that could be fixed. I have driven through many, many places, metro and country, and I know how badly those roads need to be fixed. But, do you know, it is really not about what the government says, it is about what the government does, and they are at odds more often than not.

I want to start to talk about the issues on the Big Build, and not just the Big Build projects but also other government projects that have got into a little bit of strife. It is not just the cost overruns. I mean, it goes without saying that any building project that the government embarks on overruns by I think about 30 per cent. The Auditor-General has said you add 30 per cent, which is just incredible – to think that we have to spend that much extra because they cannot manage money. It is also that they cannot manage the workforce and who they have working on these projects. So we have got the cost overruns and the rorting that is going on, people putting in for shifts they are not working. People are working three shifts at the one time, apparently. You can clock up 8 hours pretty easily on three different worksites and still be paid. You can turn up, lie down and have a little sleep and still be paid your 8 hours because you have the protection.

We have violence against women on worksites, and this is where I am going to spend the next part of my contribution. The treatment of women in construction, including on the Big Build and on government projects, is nothing but abhorrent, and it has been left to go. The Premier was all talk at question time today about everything she has been doing. Well, let me tell you everything she has not been doing for 10 years to get it to this state. It was exposed on *60 Minutes* and in the *Age* by Nick McKenzie, Sarah Danckert and Amelia Ballinger. We have seen others as well who have done that great exposé. But the chief investigator for the CFMEU administration, Geoffrey Watson SC, said the Big Build had become a place of resort for violent criminals. That is just not good enough. The government should have greater control and oversight. These people, whether they are bikies, outlaw motorcycle gang guys or violent criminals, should not be on our worksites.

We have three absolutely troubling examples that were exposed. One woman was bashed by a bikie-linked health and safety representative on his lunchbreak from a government-funded project in an attack caught on camera. I really hope that those opposite are listening to this, because these are failures under their watch. Another woman was locked in a small room, and this was at the half-built Footscray Hospital, I think. It is a government hospital. A man, who was previously jailed for violence against women, was smoking ice as he detained her. So not only was he undertaking a horrific act, but he was also off his face at the same time – doubly concerning. Another was bashed outside her worksite, and

this was also taxpayer funded, by a man with deep connections to senior CFMEU figures. That person had a similarly frightening past. So we have had violent criminals and those on drugs, and what they have done and how they have treated these women is extraordinary. It is extraordinary that they have done it and more extraordinary that they have got away.

So what happens to the women that speak out? Well, gosh, we would like the women to speak out, but they are penalised. We have had Lilly Munro, who said she was one of these women who were harassed. She said sexual harassment was normalised and endemic. And why was that the case? Because they had the protection. The perpetrators had the protection of the CFMEU or the state government contractors. That is not right. The women need to be protected on these worksites. Lilly Munro found herself black-banned. So she is the one who has been traumatised, she is the one who has had violence perpetrated against her, but she is the one who suffers the consequences, not those who have perpetrated it. It is just extraordinary. The Premier, as I said, is all talk. These people should not be on a worksite.

These stories are disturbing for a number of reasons. First of all, that they happen is staggering in itself. But secondly, those with violent histories are working on these worksites. How do they get there? Jobs for the boys, I would say. I know that those on that side are very good at providing jobs for the boys. They have all got their mates in the CFMEU. Regardless of people's background, whether they are skilled or not, jobs for the boys sees them on these worksites. And thirdly, there is the protection of the perpetrators, so that the women who complain are the ones who suffer.

Jess Hill, who is an author and journalist – she wrote *See What You Made Me Do*; it is about coercive control – said it was frightening that the taxpayer dollar has been used in this way. She said:

... inaction on bikie infiltration was always going to lead to unsafe work environments and violence against women.

Inaction. The Premier – what has her role been in this? Well, prior to being Premier, she was the Minister for Major Projects, and she has enabled that rampant corruption and union misconduct to continue on Big Build sites. This illegal behaviour, these thuggish standover tactics and this manipulation of contract agreements have contributed to that \$50 billion in major project cost blowouts that I mentioned earlier. She has turned a blind eye. There have been warnings, and at best she has turned a blind eye.

Today there are revelations that perhaps the government have been letting this corruption continue, but the Premier has turned a blind eye to years of illegal and thuggish behaviour. She oversaw preferential treatment of the CFMEU in tender documents that favoured them for the scrapped Commonwealth Games village build. In 2022 Premier Allan was provided with detailed evidence from an Indigenous labour hire firm of violence and banning by CFMEU officials. In that instance WorkSafe said they could not investigate, because they needed to be invited onto the site. That was not going to happen. I think that was another absolute failure of the government. The Premier for 12 months sat on a letter, took no action and passed the buck to the Commonwealth. What we have seen here is that every Victorian has paid the price through higher taxes and fees because the Premier has allowed her mates in the CFMEU to blow out the costs everywhere.

The government have a women-in-construction strategy. I think it was released last year. If you look at the minister's message at the front from the former Minister for Industrial Relations Tim Pallas, he said:

There will only be equal numbers of men and women working in construction if we take steps to attract, recruit and retain female workers.

Let me tell you, for Lilly Munro and her mates standing up against it, the terrible violence that is perpetrated on government worksites is certainly not going to do anything for the attraction, recruitment and retention of female workers. He then went on to say:

We need to make women aware that construction is an attractive and viable career option. Women must be proactively recruited and have access to strong career pathways. Workplaces must be inclusive and adaptive to ensure that women stay in the industry.

The government on one hand is saying, 'We want women to be in construction. We want to attract and recruit and tell them what a great industry it is and what wonderful career pathways they can have,' but I will tell you what, while their mates in the CFMEU are running the joint, not just here but all of these big construction projects on the Big Build, women are not going to be attracted. I think the government need to have a look at their strategy, but they also need to have a jolly good look at their relationships with those that are perpetrating such violence.

I think back to John Setka and to the CFMEU, and I know that there are paid-up government members of the CFMEU in this workplace now. I know there are also supporters of the CFMEU. We had an incident I think when John Setka was charged and women here reached out to him. We had the member for Kororoit with her mate Johnny. We had the member for Broadmeadows and the federal member for Bendigo Lisa Chesters, a former CEO of EMILY's List, all reaching out to express their sympathy to John. Of those women no-one reached out to say, 'Mate, that was out of line. What you did was wrong and it was out of line.' They did not condemn him for that behaviour. At the same time, they were happy to stand side by side with Rosie Batty. I do not think you can have it both ways. You are either standing against violence against women and with Rosie Betty or standing with John Setka.

At the time we put a question to the Minister for Women, asking whether or not she would call out the behaviour of John Setka. The minister would not call out the behaviour of John Setka. I think it is a name that those on the government benches are a bit reluctant to use. They are very wary of using it, but they are still there in the background supporting him. The minister would not condemn his behaviour. We asked questions also about whether he was appropriate to be a mentor or a role model in one of their programs, in the modelling respect and equality program, and they really did not want to answer that either.

There are so many problems in Victoria. There are problems for women in Victoria. There are problems for women at work, and the government has not done its duty and its due diligence to keep women safe on these worksites. They need to do more. The Premier says, 'We're doing everything.' Well, we want to see these people off the worksites. They should not be on the hospitals or on the Big Build construction sites. Drugs should not be on those sites. I can only imagine if we have got examples of people taking ice that their drug policies are failing. They should be tested, and they should not be on those worksites where you have machinery that is dangerous. We see all of the time warnings about using heavy machinery if you are on any sorts of drugs. We have got the outlaw motorcycle gangs, the bikies, infiltrating these workplaces, and that is just not the right way to lead Victoria.

As the chief investigator for the CFMEU administrator Geoffrey Watson said, the Big Build has become a 'place of resort' for violent criminals. If it is a place of resort for violent criminals, they need to do a lot more to get rid of them, to really up the ante and to make that safe for women, because women should be able to choose a career they want and to know that they will be safe in their workplace. The government has failed on all counts.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the member I would like to acknowledge in the gallery Clem Newton-Brown, former member for Prahran. Welcome back.

### Leader of the Opposition

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (17:47): It is a pleasure to rise on the grievance debate this afternoon and grieve for Victorians if they were ever to be led by a part-time Liberal Leader of the Opposition, who prioritises holidays and differing views of how that might account over community safety. But I will say this before I do get underway: I felt like a bit of a warm-up act for the member for Werribee last sitting week, and now I am speaking before the member for Prahran, who I wish very well for her inaugural speech. I know for her nearest and dearest and people that have joined I

am just a bit of a warm-up act. This is nowhere near some of the elegance that will be shown in that speech. I wish you all the best in your parliamentary career.

What an extraordinary week it has been, where the opposition leader had about four or five different truths to whether he was on leave or not. I do not discourage people from taking leave – it is important to be supportive of your family and to be in that moment. I do not think anyone begrudges that. But it was quite curious to see the variances of truth that were delivered during that time for something very innocuous. It says much around trust in the opposition and where they find themselves. Remember the big upheaval around Christmas and the new year? We saw in question time a bit of banter going across from the opposition leader to the Premier around a week off taken during Christmas and the new year, and I heard some of that banter coming through. What was happening around Christmas and the new year, I wonder? What was going on in those pivotal times where record crowds were rocking up to the MCG for the Boxing Day test? No-one was rocking up to Spring Street; there were only a few that were rocking up when the lights were off. Normally it is the quietest time around here, but no, there was a chance to roll a leader, the member for Hawthorn, who was doing some outstanding work. As the member for Hawthorn in his lived experience and own words the other day said, he never got time to take a break. I say genuinely that we saw him as hardworking and we saw the effort that he put forward. I saw that as a window into or an example of the absolute difficulties and hallmarks of the modern-day opposition, the Liberal Party and Liberal–Nationals. It is more about the power and who holds control than the policies and plans that are put forward.

In this grievance I will describe some of those key policy areas where it is about chasing the narrative of the story, rather than the hard work and policy outcomes that come forward. Two critical areas that I will focus on are mental health prevention work and the mental health levy. They were commented on by the opposition at the time – they were completely opposed to mental health and wellbeing support through the prism of a levy. That was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Mental Health. That is playing populist politics when you have a nation-leading royal commission. It was more about the grabs at that time, rather than doing the right thing for Victorians.

When the then opposition leader and then incoming Premier announced the Royal Commission into Family Violence, something as the Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change I have intimate knowledge of, now supporting the Premier and the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and Minister for Women, what was the description of that from the Liberal Party at the time around this royal commission, which now, thankfully, has bipartisan support? The member for Eildon in her shadow work does a lot of that bipartisan work in supporting that. It was going to be a lawyers picnic. Reforming and restructuring the prevention of family violence, the protection of victim-survivors and children and holding perpetrators and those that use violence to account was boiled down into some of those terms around a lawyers' picnic.

This is the challenge here for modern opposition parties that we see play out in a different frame in other states and territories. This is uniquely a Victorian Liberal Party problem, because when Peter Malinauskas in South Australia has a crisis like the Whyalla Steelworks site going under, the opposition leader was in that meeting with the Premier of the day working out emergency legislation, bipartisan legislation, that saved those jobs and saved those outcomes. When our system of democracy has half of young people thinking democracy does not work for them, we are at a serious and low ebb in the two-party structure that we are seeing erode away, and it is a race to the bottom if we keep deteriorating in the standards that we see.

Another example that we saw just recently was Prime Minister Albanese challenging the tariff changes that we saw President Trump coming forward with and the impacts on our steelworks sector as well. What does former Prime Minister John Howard say? Prime Minister Albanese is doing all he can in this space. There was a bipartisan, multipartisan approach, and it is opposition leader Dutton who comes out and says no – criticises – rather than taking the moral high ground. Maybe just take a team Australia approach and take one moment to put your political instincts aside and think for the greater good. That is what you see in the hallmarks here of what is played out in policy here in Victoria. We

see time and time again the Liberal Party more focused on themselves and tearing themselves apart than on trying to put forward alternative policies and bringing them forward.

I ask those opposite, who will come in in various frames and who are tuning in across the Parliament right now: what has changed? What has been the big visceral change since the member for Hawthorn, who would do more doorstops than anyone in the day, who would go out with the blue banner in the opposition room or be out in the garden? What has changed? Because we count the amount of times that the member for Hawthorn got up there. It was every day, and that was including during some pretty challenging episodes down the road in the court precinct. He would still be out there. We have not seen anywhere near the volume and effort from the member for Berwick and Leader of the Opposition at all, and that is why the part-time rhetoric comes in. The member for Berwick made that comment about the member for Carrum, the Minister for Planning and Attorney-General, who has done an extraordinary amount of policy work in the last month, more than any of the shadow cabinet has done in 11 years. She has done an extraordinary amount of work.

**Cindy McLeish** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** The member for Eildon says, 'Part-time.' I know it is becoming a bit of a flavour, and we see that with some of the concerns, and it is not just in my words. I will open up the laptop, member for Eildon, again and get the notes up. It is colleagues of yours that are backgrounding.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the Chair.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** What were the comments made by an unknown source, I wonder? Well, we could do a little bit of the who's who over there, couldn't we? We could run through it. We see it in the little tribes that form out on the back annex. We go, 'Oh, hang on, there are yesterday's heroes hanging out with the member for Hawthorn, who were the ones that got rolled and lost positions.' The member for Sandringham I thought was doing okay. I thought the baritone of Sandringham was doing an all-right job. Suddenly no more. The then potential deputy leader, the member for Kew, I think everyone thought was a rising star and talent. No, it was the champion of Nepean coming through. Off you go. It is an all-bloke affair at the front of the table there. As if the hallmarks of the modern Liberal Party are not challenged by exactly not having quotas and representation, the talented member for Kew was then demoted from that portfolio and put back further after being an incredibly effective communicator in the Parliament and in the media. You wonder why, if people are meeting performance outcomes, when people are doing fundamentally their job in holding government to account, they suddenly get demoted and impacted on. This is the hallmark of what you see that is truly a Liberal problem that we face in Victoria.

On cue – not on Kew literally, the member for Kew – the member for Hawthorn walks in. We have commented a bit on the collective 'why' or 'what if' about where the member for Hawthorn finds himself now. I mean, we saw the doorstop going past, and we saw there was a moment: 'Do I take up the question from Richard Willingham from the ABC? Should I? Should I?' You saw something you had not seen for a couple of months – the glint in the eyes, the twinkle, the mojo back, saying, 'I've never taken a break. I never found the time to take a break.' We noticed that. We noticed that, member for Hawthorn. We commend you on your service during that time. We are still wondering why on earth you are sitting on the ejector seat that has been sat on by former premiers or former opposition leaders. We are still wondering ourselves.

One big deficit during that time, though, was the effort in policy and contribution that was made at that time. That was the missing ingredient. And what we see backgrounded by colleagues at shadow cabinet right now is there is actually less energy and purpose since the member for Berwick took over. There is less policy development. People are looking sideways going, 'When is it going to start to happen? Where are things like the change that we all hoped for and were promised when the member for Caulfield and the member for Hawthorn were rolled? When is it going to start? When are we going to warm up?' Well, it has been a few months here. There are about 20 per cent of the doorstops done.

There is less engagement with stakeholders than we have ever seen before from those opposite, and we see a populist, narrow, oppositionist approach, which we see playing out at the moment federally as well.

It gets into a serious dynamic, though. It is one thing for this thing to be about power and structure. It is another thing to then talk about governing. And when you have this approach, when you hate your colleagues more than you hate the Labor Party, you know you have got a lot of problems in your ranks. When you background and have a crack at your own team more than you do to the government, then you know that there are a lot of challenges.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Polwarth!

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Just a bit of truth has been dropped here, just a few –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Members will come to order!

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Just getting a bit of a feeling there, Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Mordialloc, without assistance.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Oh, but you know I appreciate a bit of assistance, Speaker.

There is a lot of stuff. But it gets to the serious points around governing and governing our state, when you are more focused on yourselves than you are on governing for our state and making the hard calls. Remember the member for Berwick was a champion for raising the age of criminal responsibility. Remember that fireside chat piece that he had with the *Guardian* on the new, modern Liberal: ‘I’m up for raising the age. I want to change bail outcomes.’ And then as soon as the populist approach comes through, we see a change in tone. We saw it recently, and the extraordinary, extraordinary thing is I thought the member for Berwick would take the moral high ground. He put the origami set away, the papier-mâché of the weird car thing with Nine News. Remember when the member for Hawthorn was on an absolute tear and he had the doorstop ready to go. He had the government on the ropes on that particular day, and the member for Berwick was down in McCrae or down in – I do not know if he talked to the member for Nepean about this, but he was down the road with a papier-mâché display and a laser pointer-clicker going through some really strange conspiracy theory. He had not talked about it for a number of weeks, and when asked went, ‘Oh, actually, I’ll go back there again. I’ll go back again.’ That goes to the problem of whether the modern Liberal Party is more about populist policies or a populist approach or power and structure, hunting itself rather than focusing on Victorians.

I will go back to that again. We are seeing this time and time again in policies. They are opposed to school builds – no new school built when we came into government, more than 100 on the way. They have no infrastructure build agenda – literally we came from a standing start when we started. We then saw during the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System a levy that was recommended that was opposed by those opposite, politicising that important royal commission that funded outcomes to make sure that we lower the toll of mental health trauma. We saw the prevention of family violence that I talked about before, with 227 recommendations that were put forward that were so critical in keeping women and children safe and holding perpetrators to account. That work, billions of dollars done, was described by those opposite as a lawyers picnic – a lawyers picnic for people who were not safe and were vulnerable in our local community. And time and time again we saw during the pandemic the undermining of our health workers, our nurses and our midwives, out on the steps of Parliament, undermining messages, undermining Victoria Police. That is not what modern governments strive to do.

We have got another example in New South Wales. What did the former premier of New South Wales say, Dom Perrottet? This was a goodie. The member for Sandringham had the former premier out for that little fundraising powwow chat. Dom Perrottet, one of the heroes of the modern Liberal Party, said cost escalations on projects are a necessary part of doing business on the eastern seaboard. That is what the member said. You have got to keep going and deliver them.

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Speaker, I take personal offence to what the member is saying. The former Premier of New South Wales had so much more to say than just that, and I think that if the member on his feet –

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

**Tim RICHARDSON:** I have him on the hook down the road at Sandy and Mordi, and he is on the hook again, the member for Sandringham. Well, he said he was. We have got to keep going, said Dom Perrottet, the former Premier. Then what happened in New South Wales? The greatest bipartisan moment: Premier Chris Minns, former Premier Dom Perrottet, arm in arm opening up a tunnel. Imagine that. Imagine if you stepped up into a bipartisan approach thinking about the interests of Victorians not those opposite thinking of themselves, not backgrounding on themselves or undermining the new opposition leader with leaks out of shadow cabinet, trying to destroy another leader for the member for Nepean to step up very soon.

#### **Question agreed to.**

**The SPEAKER:** I would like to acknowledge in the gallery former members for Prahran Leonie Hemingway and Clem Newton-Brown, who I believe has been acknowledged already, former member for Monash Province Peter Katsambanis and former senator Helen Kroger.

### *Members*

#### **Member for Prahran**

##### *Inaugural speech*

**The SPEAKER** (18:02): The time has come for me to interrupt business for the member for Prahran to make her inaugural speech. I remind members to observe the courtesies of inaugural speeches, and I remind visitors in the galleries that no photography or filming is allowed.

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) (18:02): It is an honour to address this Assembly as the member for Prahran and as the first person of Thai heritage to be elected to this Parliament and only the second female to hold the seat since its creation in 1889.

Prahran is the smallest electorate by area in our wonderful state. It is a place known as a tourist destination, a great place to visit and a wonderful place to live. Prahran is home to many buildings of major historical significance, including the Shrine of Remembrance, Government House, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Prahran Market, Como House, the Astor and the Melbourne Shul, home to one of Australia's first Jewish congregations. It boasts wonderful bike tracks and walking tracks and offers a variety of water activities along our famed stretch of the Yarra River. We have exceptional local schools, both state and independent, that provide choice and quality education for local students. We also have our much-loved Alfred hospital, which offers important health services and conducts world-leading research. The iconic Chapel Street runs through the heart of the electorate.

We have some of the most vulnerable people in our state, and we are also home to many of our most successful Victorians. We have historically strong, active and proud Jewish and Greek communities. We also have a thriving LGBTQI community that adds to the diversity of our area. We have large numbers of public housing units that offer shelter and support for our most vulnerable. We have many young people who are living out of home for the first time. We have residents who have lived in the area for generations.

Prahran is already a very densely populated area and is experiencing problems servicing this area. It is the place that my family and I chose to establish our home more than 20 years ago, and it is a great honour to now represent the hopes and dreams, needs and aspirations of my local community in the Parliament of Victoria.

My grandparents escaped Communism in China in the 1930s, and they fled to Thailand to set up a better life. Thailand offered them hope and the ability to get ahead. My grandmother could not read or write. Women were not afforded those opportunities in China back then, and, sadly, millions of women are still denied such opportunities today in many parts of the world. My grandparents set up their new home in Bangkok's Chinatown. Starting with nothing, they worked tirelessly to build their business and raise 12 children. They worked hard, and they were rewarded for their efforts. They knew that education was key to the future for their children, and they sacrificed a lot to provide their children with a better education than they had had. That is how my dad ended up in Melbourne just after the White Australia policy ended. Alone as a 16-year-old, he soon discovered that it was completely unlike bustling Bangkok. He had no winter clothes, the shops closed at midday on Saturdays and there was not a mango in sight. I simply cannot imagine the resilience it would take for a non-English-speaking teenage boy to start school and integrate into local society, but he managed to do it, like so many other migrants to Victoria and Australia have done over the years.

My dad met my Aussie mum at a Thai function. They fell in love, and then I came along. We initially lived in Noble Park, well before that area became home to many other Asian Australian families, and nearby Springvale, an active hub of Asian culture. We then moved to Dingley at a time when that area was transitioning from market gardens to housing estates. As teenagers, my friends and I loved visiting Chapel Street. It was eclectic, sophisticated and sometimes a bit edgy. My aunt owned Asian grocery shops on Chapel Street, and I would spend all my holidays helping her and my cousins.

Being an only child with tiger parents, I was determined to get ahead. I completed my degree at Monash University in sociology and Australian politics; later I obtained graduate qualifications in business, immigration law and teaching. Coming out of university with a HECS debt and a car loan, I ran straight into the 1990s recession. However, I was lucky enough to secure wonderful employment opportunities, and I became brand manager at Cadbury, where I created the giant Caramello koala. I went on to marketing roles at the *Age*, SBS and the National Trust of Australia. At SBS I was immersed in the fabric of multicultural Australia, and I was committed to the benefits of multiculturalism.

I am proud of my Thai heritage, I am proud of my Chinese heritage and I am proud of my Australian heritage. That diverse background helped to form my view that Australia needs to be a culturally diverse yet socially cohesive nation. In the 1990s One Nation first emerged in Australia, with policies that spread division rather than unity within our community. I wanted to demonstrate that an open, welcoming and culturally diverse society brings true benefits to Australia. With sensible immigration, good policy and inclusive language we could reap even more benefits for a country already built on successive waves of immigration. I wanted to see our state and country flourish with prosperity, with minimal government interference, and to see people of all cultures and backgrounds who want to and can work hard being rewarded for their efforts.

I was attracted to the Liberal Party because it shares my values of freedom of thought, worship, speech and association. It promotes the fiscal responsibility my parents always stressed to me. It is a party that encourages and supports small business and values minimal government interference in our daily lives. The Liberal Party stands for giving people a hand up, not a handout. That is exactly what my grandparents sought when they escaped communism. So 25 years ago, when I was working and living in Sydney, I was motivated to join the Liberal Party. In the process I met my husband Simon – who says politics is boring – and we relocated back to Melbourne.

I have enjoyed a career that has been challenging and that has enabled me to contribute to areas that are important to me. I have been a Commonwealth tribunal member, reviewing matters on appeal in

immigration, social security and child support. I have also been an assistant commissioner in Victoria, reviewing FOI matters.

Simon and I have three amazing children, Scarlet, Fletcher and Jasmine. I am so proud that they are healthy and happy and that they passionately support each other. Now that they are teenagers, our dinnertime conversations are dynamic and challenging, and they provide valuable insights and perspective for me.

In the last 12 months we have seen almost half the world's population vote in national elections. Across the globe there has been a shift in politics towards the right. Many have attributed this to global cost-of-living pressures, and Victorians definitely know how tough it is to make ends meet in this state. However, I consider that this shift also indicates a broader desire for change from the status quo. During the hectic recent by-election so many locals pointed out the pressures they were under, many living from pay cheque to pay cheque, unable to break into the housing market and struggling to meet their commitments.

Families or those wanting to start a family are worried about finding child care or paying for their children's basic school needs. Traders discuss the cost of doing business and the real decline of Chapel Street, and so many shops are empty because of high taxes and charges and rising antisocial behaviour. More people than ever are homeless and forced to live on the streets because of the lack of funding for outreach services and lack of transition housing. However, the overriding concern by far was the rising level of crime. Fifty-two per cent of Prahran residents are women; they feel unsafe and vulnerable. The crime rate in Prahran is three times the state average. Our local police are doing their best, but they need more resources to have a more visible police presence in the local area.

A major issue is the rampant rise in antisemitism. The firebombing of a synagogue in the neighbouring suburb was simply the most egregious of a long series of attacks and threats endured by our local Jewish community, and it deeply saddens me that these people who have contributed so much to our state and our nation feel voiceless, alienated and unsafe. They deserve representatives in a state government that stands with them and actively fights antisemitism until it is permanently eliminated.

I have always looked for opportunities for improvement, both personally and professionally, and now I extend this to the seat of Prahran. I would not have this opportunity without the support of many people, and I want to place on record my enormous gratitude for their ongoing support and friendship.

I acknowledge my parents, Lesley and Suthep. You know I love you, and I do sort of tease that you were tiger parents, and it is a trait I have inherited. My husband Simon, I am so grateful for your love and support and for our mutual passion for Liberal politics and for giving me our beautiful children Scarlet, Fletcher and Jasmine. To my friends from school – primary school and high school – Danielle and Sally. To my Liberal friends, the chair of our Prahran conference Julie and the Prahran SEC executive. I would also like to recognise Karalee and Peter Katsambanis. Peter, a former upper house member in Victorian politics, has backed me and guided me in this journey and has been a dear friend for decades. To Liz, Jacqui, Will, Marcus, Jack and John, who have provided wonderful advice and support. To the many members of my local branches and beyond who volunteered, with special mention to the great campaigners Nate and Paul. To Helen, Karen and Michael – all have provided great insight over a long time now; and to the local school mums who have cheered me on. Tonight I acknowledge the contribution of two former Liberal members for Prahran, Leonie Hemingway, aka Burke, and Clem Newton Brown. It has been a pleasure to get to know them both, and I have valued their insights and support. I am grateful for the professionalism, dedication and hard work of our Liberal secretariat team and most importantly the people of Prahran, who have put their trust in me.

Our community recently came together with the tragic passing of a much-loved 17-year-old following his rowing training. Eddie was a student at a school in my electorate. His father is a dear friend. Eddie's funeral was unspeakably sad but was filled with friends from every school in the electorate. It was a

reminder of how important community is. It goes well beyond politics and was a poignant reminder of what truly matters in life.

I love our local area, and as long as I am its representative in this place I will strive to protect and preserve the good things. I will fight to fix the things that need to be fixed to make our area an even better place to live. I want to address the significant erosion in social values within our community. One example of this erosion of values is the growing lack of respect for our police, which inevitably leads to a shortage of new recruits willing to join the force to protect our community. Safety was never a concern when I was a teenager going to Chapel Street. I want women and children, people of all ages, to feel just as safe everywhere in our state as my friends and I felt back then. Chapel Street was once a premier tourist destination; providing a better police presence and funding more CCTV in the area is a starting point, but more needs to be done. Traders and local residents have emphasised the need for a genuine strategy to bring local businesses, residents, police, the tourism industry, state government agencies and Stonnington council together. A key focus of that strategy needs to be a return of regular festivals and other activations such as lighting and public art to make the streets feel better and a must-visit destination for locals and tourists. As a local member, I want to make sure the strategy comes together and succeeds in stimulating the local economy and driving new employment opportunities.

We need to ensure that local families have ongoing access to quality child care – for example, that provided at Windsor childcare centre, which supports 100 local families. It operates on land gifted to Swinburne University by the Baillieu Liberal government for this purpose. It should not be sold for development, and it is incumbent on the state government to make sure this does not happen.

Our aspiring female sports stars deserve to have appropriate dressing-room facilities. This includes the girls and women who play at the Toorak Prahran Cricket Club in Orrong park. It is the largest cricket club in Victoria with the fastest growing female program, yet it has got no female change rooms, nor does it have disability access. This needs to be addressed immediately.

I will also be initiating a forum to bring local women together in a supportive environment where they can identify opportunities to assist and mentor each other in their studies, to access business opportunities and to exchange ideas.

Despite the existing high density in our area, I recognise the need for further development to meet current and future housing needs, including affordable housing. We are not NIMBYs; however, we do not believe it is fair, reasonable or democratic to deny local residents a say in changes that will fundamentally change the nature and character of their local area. I will resist planning proposals that take these rights away from local residents.

The Prahran by-election highlighted a concerning trend for democracy in this state. The election turnout was only 68.3 per cent, and that means that 15,000 eligible voters did not cast a vote. This was despite two weeks of pre-poll. The length of this period needs to be reviewed, as it created an enormous pressure on election staff and candidate volunteers. The previous recommendation of the Electoral Matters Committee to limit pre-poll to seven days before election day should be reconsidered. The selection of pre-poll places must also be reviewed, as the two chosen for this by-election were inappropriate locations and hard to access, which created problems for staff, volunteers and voters. Postal voting should be made easier and more accessible for people who are unable to physically access polling booths.

In closing, I wish to thank my parliamentary colleagues for their support for Prahran at the by-election. Your collegiality and professionalism are very much valued. The people of Prahran experienced a sea of blue, with star power from parliamentary colleagues across the state and ongoing support, I would like to recognise, from Brad Battin, Sam Groth, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, David Southwick and John Pesutto. I will relish this opportunity to represent my constituents and advocate for an electorate

that is a much-loved place to live and visit in Victoria. Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to address the house. ขอขอบคุณมากครับค่ะ.

*Members applauded.*

### **Bills**

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

##### *Second reading*

##### **Debate resumed.**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (18:23): I seem to have cleared the room out a little here. I rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024. The Greens do welcome efforts to reduce gambling harm, and poker machines contribute an enormous amount to that harm. These machines of misery are purposely designed to generate addiction. Poker machines strip-mine the physical health, the mental health and the finances and futures of individuals, families and communities across the state. In Victoria across the last year, in 2023–24, the losses to poker machines were just over \$3 billion, the highest on record. So we did welcome the announcement in July 2023 that the previous minister and previous Premier made that all gambling venues in Victoria will require mandatory carded play with precommitment limits.

Now, getting on towards two years later, we have got this bill, which is designed to give powers to the minister to introduce mandatory precommitment and carded play transition arrangements for gambling venues across Victoria. In plain English, this will mean that people are not able to use poker machines unless they have an ID-linked card called mandatory carded play, and the player will be able to set their own voluntary daily limits on the card, known as precommitment. As the Alliance for Gambling Reform told us:

Evidence shows that mandatory carded play with pre-commitment is the gold standard for reducing gambling harm from poker machines.

As a result of the royal commission, this was implemented at Crown from December last year. And while the Greens would prefer a policy setting that Western Australia still has in place, where poker machines are contained only to the casino and not let loose like a pack of hungry wolves across our communities in pubs and clubs, it is important that all venues in Victoria with poker machines have this same system. I would like to acknowledge the government's reforms that have been introduced already, such as uniform closing times for poker machine venues as well as reform of Crown and the new regulator, which has substantive powers and is now investigating the industry and issuing fines for breaches.

We also support that this bill has a provision that will lower spin rates of poker machines from the current 2.3 seconds to 3 seconds per spin. The bill will also require ID verification requirements for cash payouts of more than \$1000, which is a welcome anti-money-laundering measure. As we understand from briefings that the minister's office has provided, because the bill does not contain this amount of detail, the intention is that a daily limit will be possible but the person using the poker machine must set their own daily limit and, once that limit is reached, the card will lock the player out. We understand that there will be no legislated daily limit, unfortunately, so theoretically a person could set their own limit to lose \$1000 or \$10,000 or \$100,000 per day, but at least it will be mandatory to set a limit.

Other issues that we would like to see addressed are slower spin rates – slower still – loyalty scheme infringement notices, voluntary binding loss limits lasting for 48 hours and turning off losses disguised as wins. One of the main concerns the Greens have is the implementation schedule of these reforms, which is split in three phases over 2025, 2026 and 2027. We know that the substantive harm reduction benefits of the bill will only occur when both mandatory cards and precommitment are in place, which is (a) not in the legislation but will be at the minister's discretion via directions or regulations and (b)

scheduled for 2027, which is after the next state election and therefore at the whim of the new minister. Given that there has been so much arguing in the other place over what date this year a machete will be banned in Victoria, surely putting a date in this bill to limit the \$3 billion worth of annual losses that Victorians suffer, including suffering that can sometimes include death or injury, is not unreasonable. The delayed introduction of these modest reforms suggests Labor is not terribly enthusiastic about regulating a system that preys on the vulnerable and worsens poverty.

Gambling is a dangerous industry that profits off misery and harm, and while this bill has important reforms that will reduce gambling harm, they should go further and can too easily be wound back by a change in government. To protect the countless Victorian families impacted by gambling harm, we need to legislate these reforms properly and we want to work with the government to make that happen.

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (18:28): I rise to support the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024. Firstly I would like to acknowledge the work of Minister Horne in her time as Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation on gambling reform. I congratulate her strong advocacy and tireless work towards minimising gambling harm in the Victorian community, and I know the new minister is just as committed to reform.

The Allan Labor government has already taken significant steps to minimise gambling-related harm, including establishing the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, VGCCC, Australia's strongest gambling regulator; mandatory carded play for pokies at Crown, ensuring players track and manage their gambling; and mandatory closure periods. Since 30 August 2024, all hotels and clubs must close gaming areas between 4 am and 10 am to reduce extended gambling sessions. This bill ensures that the steps already implemented to minimise gambling harm continue to be supported by even stronger measures.

The cost of gambling goes beyond the individual. It affects families, businesses and the wider community. When gambling becomes out of control, the costs are financial distress, mental health issues and problems at work and with relationships. The link between gambling harm and suicide is long established, with Suicide Prevention Australia noting that nearly one in five people showing signs of suicidal behaviour also struggle with gambling addiction.

This bill will introduce account-based play on gaming machines in Victoria, building on the carded play already implemented at Crown. A patron will need to insert a card to use a gaming machine, with the card allowing the player to track their gambling habits and allowing them to precommit to a maximum limit that they are willing to lose. Technology is rapidly evolving. Our phones tell us the screen time, can track our preferences and target advertising. It is time to use technology and data to help reduce gambling harm in a positive way. Precommitment allows players to set voluntary limits, helping to prevent financial harm before it occurs, while still allowing them to enjoy gaming responsibly. Account-based play provides more real-time information to patrons, helping them to keep an eye on just exactly how much they are spending and losing. It also enables a range of harm-minimisation measures, including precommitment. The repetitive nature of electronic gaming machines makes it all too easy to lose track of how much has been spent. By imposing a limit on the card it reduces the potential to spend more than you originally planned. The card will also safeguard by having a cooling-off period for any increases to the precommitment limit. The increased limit will only come into effect after 24 hours, mitigating the risk of creeping up a limit once the losses accumulate.

Account-based play will also introduce identity requirements to be attached to each card. This will help prevent criminals from using the machines and the venues to launder money obtained from the proceeds of crime. The additional layer of identity security will ensure that venues are verifying the identity of players before paying out credits of \$2000 or more. Money laundering is always rapidly evolving, so this bill will help strengthen the existing protections.

People visit gaming venues not just for gambling activities but also for affordable meals, social participation, recreation and entertainment. For many it is an opportunity to combat loneliness and isolation. This bill will ensure that gambling remains a recreation and not an addiction. I would like to highlight some of the important work being done by local councils and groups to offer alternative social opportunities to the community outside of a gaming venue. Libraries After Dark offers a variety of after-hours programming provided through local libraries on Thursday nights across 13 local government areas. The program is designed to provide at-risk groups with a range of social or recreational options during the evening. Libraries After Dark was funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation through their 2020–24 strategic partnership program. It was first trialed in Merri-bek many years ago. The program runs in my electorate at both Broadmeadows and Glenroy libraries, and it is different every week. It offers things like board games, film and sports screenings, workshops and fascinating guest speakers. It is a safe and inclusive environment offering alternative activities to a night spent at a local gaming facility.

I would also like to thank the work of the Chatty Cafe Scheme operating in my Broadmeadows electorate through both the Glenroy and Broadmeadows libraries and the Dallas Neighbourhood House. The Chatty Cafe movement aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness by supporting the local community to connect. Neighbourhood houses and libraries do such a wonderful job of running low-cost or often free programs and offering a safe space to anyone to come, and they are always welcoming and abuzz with activity. Loneliness and isolation are a huge problem in our communities, and these programs help prevent that and address it. It was great to see the Dallas Neighbourhood House with Minister Spence lately and to hear all about their wonderful programs, including Crafty Sisters; Morning Melodies; coffee, cake and bingo; community lunches; Discomania; Spanish seniors group; Turkish women's group; Turkish choir; Musical Fun Times; carpet bowls; chair exercises and meditation; walk, talk and feel good; Young @ Hearts; Out & About; English and digital literacy courses for everyone but also the Vietnamese community; cooking, gardening and sewing classes; refugee and asylum seeker support; assistance with form filling; advocacy and financial materials support; and a food parcel program, which we recently granted an additional \$45,000 to.

I would also like to thank Hume council for their work in reducing gambling harm in the community. Their gambling harm minimisation policy acknowledges that whilst gambling is a legal activity, for some it can lead to harmful consequences, not only for the gambler but also for families in the wider community. Their commitment to gambling harm reduction in a public health manner ensures that the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors is at the heart of their approach to gambling in my electorate. Social isolation due to language, age and socio-economic restraints is an issue faced by residents in Broadmeadows. Gambling is an issue that affects many in the local community, and the council has worked hard to minimise gambling-related harm by ensuring gaming venues have a regulated role and ensure the responsible serving of gambling and alcohol. I also want to give a shout-out to Merri-bek council for their longstanding commitment to gambling harm minimisation and particularly former fellow councillors Alice Pryor and Mark Higginbotham at what was then the Moreland council for their strong advocacy over many years.

It was also pleasing to get a letter from Martin Thomas, the CEO of the Alliance for Gambling Reform, stating that:

Evidence shows that mandatory carded play with pre-commitment is the gold standard for reducing gambling harm from poker machines. As a result of the Royal Commission, this was implemented at Crown from December 2024 and this legislation supports the remaining venues in Victoria with EGM's to have the same system for patrons to play.

The losses to poker machines in Victoria in 2023/24 were \$3.03b, the highest on record.

The Alliance strongly supports and applauds Victoria's decision to support the mandatory carded play with pre-commitment ...

I really thank the Alliance for Gambling Reform and the 24 local leadership councils for their ongoing work and advocacy in this space, including Merri-bek, Hume, Mooney Valley, Darebin, Mitchell,

Mornington, Whitehorse, Wyndham, Knox, Maribyrnong, Manningham, Kingston, Hobsons Bay, Shepparton, Monash, Maroondah, Dandenong, Whittlesea, Melbourne, Banyule, Yarra, Glen Eira, Frankston and Brimbank. It is really important work, and I am so pleased that their councillors helped fund the anti-gambling alliance.

While this bill focuses on minimising gambling-related harm, we must acknowledge the place that community clubs, RSLs and hospitality venues play within the Victorian community. For many, they are a place to catch up with friends and family, celebrate special occasions or just enjoy a night out. The group of mums I met in my eldest's first year of primary school are still firm friends, and we regularly catch up at the Glenroy RSL for a central place to have dinner and a good yarn. I thank Ken and the team from the RSL for always making locals feel welcome. Many community clubs also make a significant contribution to local communities, supporting grassroots sport, charities and social programs that benefit thousands of Victorians. All of these programs in turn provide an outlet and an opportunity to exercise, socialise and participate in activities that keep people of all ages occupied and away from gambling harm.

This bill introduces further measures to reduce gambling harm. In addition to carded play, all new electronic gaming machines installed in venues after a prescribed date will need to have a spin rate of longer than 3 seconds. The spin rate is currently set at 2.14 seconds, so this legislation will slow down the speed and amount of turns for the same time currently being played on machines. Research has found that higher play speeds are associated with higher bets, longer play and some level of impaired control while gambling. Slowing the spin rate will help slow the pace at which gamblers lose money and is expected to reduce gambling harm. The Allan Labor government has already implemented the closure of local gaming venues from 4 am to 10 am, another crucial step in reducing impaired judgement. Fatigue reduces the player's ability to make good decisions. All of these measures go hand in hand to ensure that the player can make informed and good choices when playing EGMs.

Rest, a slower spin rate on gaming machines to prevent rapid and excessive gambling, precommitment levels and information on gambling trends will minimise harm and support responsible gaming. Slowing the spin rate on gambling machines goes further towards reducing money laundering as well, as the time taken to launder the same amount of money will increase and discourage the illegal activity. The Allan Labor government is clear in its commitment. This bill will also create more accountability for loyalty scheme providers. They must provide information when required to ensure that venue rewards programs are not being used to encourage excessive gambling. I support the bill.

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (18:38): I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024. This is another important bill, one of the many gambling-related amendments that we have seen here in this place over the past few years. I would like to take this opportunity to also commend the minister in the other place for that and for bringing this bill forward. The host of legislation being delivered shows the commitment of the minister and this government to delivering on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and, importantly, to gambling harm minimisation, which is extremely important to many of my constituents.

I want to also acknowledge the bravery and experience of the member for Eureka. I also agree with the member for Melton; sometimes we do gamble in a recreational way. Sometimes you go out with your friends and just put \$20 or \$50 into that.

This is another important bill, which will amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991 in relation to precommitment and carded play. This is welcome news in my electorate, across the City of Greater Dandenong and City of Kingston and across the south-east. I have spoken on gambling-related harm in the Clarinda district many times before in this place, and it has continued to be an issue for many. The City of Greater Dandenong in particular, as you may know, Acting Speaker Hamer, continues to suffer, and the statistics are quite alarming. On the 2023–24 figures, almost \$138 million was lost to pokies in the 14 gambling venues in just the City of Greater

Dandenong. That is very high considering the socio-economic situation in this local government area, amounting to the second-highest rate of pokies loss per adult in Victoria. It is devastating that so often this is targeting and hurting those that can least afford it, and the wider impacts are being felt across the community from the harm to the health and wellbeing of many of my constituents through financial stress, relationship breakdown, family violence and mental illness and other negative impacts that come with gambling addiction. It is important that we continue to remind ourselves of this harm and we continue to work together to address and mitigate the harm wherever we can.

I want to acknowledge the many community organisations that have worked so hard to combat that. There are some great community organisations working to address this impact. In my own community, there are the Cambodian Association of Victoria, the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association and the South East Melbourne Vietnamese Association Council, also known as SEMVAC, and I commend these organisations for the work that they do and also the many other community organisations. We will continue to support this work and to deliver the legislation that will help minimise gambling-related harm wherever possible. That continues here today with this bill, one that will amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991 in relation to precommitment and carded play.

There are some important tools in this bill. Firstly, the bill will amend the permitted spin rate on gaming machines to a minimum of 3 seconds. This is an important practical step, slowing the pace of the game down and limiting the amount that can be lost. It can be dizzying and also really sad to see the rapid fire of spin, over and over and over, with some of our vulnerable just hitting the electronic gaming machine button as fast as possible and watching those losses add up and add up and add up. This is an important reform that will keep pace with the emerging technologies gaming machines are using, produce a safer gambling environment and help vulnerable patrons to take a break.

There is also a requirement for a player card to be issued to meet the requirements set out in the regulations, and an operator will be prohibited from issuing a player card without first verifying the player's identity, which as we heard is an important change. Not having my own experience, I listened keenly yesterday to the contributions by members from the other side talking about it as just a leisure or recreational activity. You think that you can put \$20 or \$50 in a gaming machine, but nowadays you have to go through double-ID authentication. These are all preventative, minimising measures.

There are also powers for the minister, which include enabling the minister to direct the loyalty scheme provider or venue operator to provide loyalty scheme information to the minister or to the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission. There is also an ability to direct and monitor to ensure a person may not play on a gaming machine without a player account.

Additionally, the bill will prohibit a venue operator from allowing someone to play a gaming machine without using a player card where a direction to the monitor is in place, and it will expand the existing regulation-making power so a requirement may be prescribed for precommitment and carded play here. There are important changes that set out the framework for mandatory and binding precommitment across Victoria, and that is important because it helps to put the power back into the consumers' hands and support them to gamble within their limits. Account-based play provides more and real-time information to a player, helping them to take control of their own decisions. It has also enabled a range of harm-minimisation measures which of course include precommitment and what I already said about you having to have a card in order to put a bet on. Amount-based play and identity requirements also help prevent criminals from using venues and machines to launder money, which is another positive step which is also important for my constituents in the south-east. These reforms build on the findings of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and provide the framework to expand the nation-leading protections introduced at the Melbourne casino to the other gaming venues across the state. Again, these are important changes that will be welcome news for many in my community of Clarinda, and as such I am proud to support these changes here today.

Once again I commend the effort of the minister in the other place for bringing them forward and for the commitment to minimising gambling harm in our community. We have seen a demonstrated commitment from the government to addressing and tackling that harm through the host of legislation that we have introduced, but there is more work to be done to protect our community from gaming harm. That will continue to be done here with this bill and will be ongoing in the community. I look forward to continuing to work with the community locally, with some of our local groups, as mentioned above, as well as with council and with others to continue to push for change, particularly in Greater Dandenong and in our multicultural community. I want to continue too that hard and important conversation to address the stigma of gambling harms and encourage help seeking. This is really important, and we continue to do everything we can to support and to protect our community and to deliver legislation, regulation and initiatives that can deliver real, meaningful change where it is needed. I commend this bill to the house.

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (18:48): I rise to speak in favour of the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024. It was not too long ago that I made the very rare trip into Melbourne – it is very rare that I cross the West Gate – for a family dinner at Crown. Walking through the maze of corridors, we went through the pokies area and soon the \$20 note in my pocket started burning a hole. I went to try and throw the \$20 into something like More Chilli or one of those flashing pokie things that they have got at Crown, but I could not. I saw firsthand those new card-play rules in action, and I kept that lobster in my pocket. In all seriousness, this legislation is not just about reducing the opportunity for the occasional punt. This is about minimising harm for people who may be at risk or are displaying signs of addiction to gambling. This bill strikes a balance between providing those restrictions while ensuring that community clubs, RSLs and hospitality venues remain an important part of Victorian life.

By introducing account-based play on gaming machines in Victoria, we are putting the power back in the hands of patrons. We know that when punters lose control the cost is financial distress, mental health concerns and relationship issues. We are serious about addressing gambling harm and money laundering in gaming, which is exactly why we are establishing further protections for the community. As technology evolves and best practice continues to develop, these reforms provide a flexible and adaptable foundation that allows for improvement and refinement. No government has done more than this government to prevent gambling-related harm.

There are a number of community clubs in my electorate that take in gaming revenue and invest these profits back into my local community, including the Werribee RSL, which is now one of my neighbours in my new electorate office, which does a lot for veterans in Wyndham and leads the remembrance activities in our community. It was only on Friday that I dropped by to enjoy some of that hospitality with some former colleagues. The Italian Sports Club is also a venue in my electorate, which helps support our emerging soccer stars in Wyndham. There are a number of pubs which have gaming machines as well. While we do see some good work from the profits from these poker machines, we do know there is a great deal of harm that comes from gambling and out-of-control gambling. Werribee, Manor Lakes, Wyndham Vale and Little River are working-class communities where some people live pay cheque to pay cheque. Some of the communities with the lowest socio-economic outcomes are in my electorate. This government is doing a lot to reduce cost-of-living pressures on families, and it would be remiss to not also target the causes of financial harm for communities like mine. Some data from a few years ago shows that nearly \$290,000 a day is lost in the Wyndham local government area through pokie machines and problem gambling. We need to make sure that harm that stems from problem gambling is minimised.

I have seen the effect gambling addiction has on local families through my work in a school. It is not just the financial impact but the emotional toll that tears families apart. A 2016 report identified the following types of harm: relationship difficulties, health problems, emotional and psychological distress, financial problems, issues with work or study, cultural problems and criminal activity. In my electorate we also have an extremely culturally diverse community. There are specific issues with

gambling amongst different culturally and linguistically diverse groups, something identified by Turning Point addiction services in a report. Some of the specific issues include gambling being a part of their culture and how they socialise, seeing gambling as part of the Australian culture that they are now in and feeling isolated and finding gambling venues welcoming. I echo some of the words from the member for Broadmeadows about the great programs offering alternative venues for this socialisation outside of those normal hours of the day – they are really important to have. There are also issues around experiencing trauma and how that can lead to problem gambling. There are also issues with using gambling as a way to cope with stress. Finally, one of the other things that this report found was that quite often people feel pressure to make the most of their new life in a new country and turn to gambling.

These reforms have been spoken about in a lot of detail by many people in the house here tonight and throughout the day, but I just want to touch on a few particular things that this bill seeks to do. Introducing mandatory carded play and having the pilot program and rolling it out across the state is a really important staged approach to have that technology and system so that people can control what they spend and what they are willing to lose. This precommitment allows players to set voluntary limits, helping to prevent financial harm before it occurs, while still allowing them to have a punt. We also know that technology is changing. For many people digital cards are replacing physical cards. It was very rare for me to have that \$20 in my pocket that night; I do not know where I got it from. But as a millennial, I do not carry cash. This legislation provides a framework to adapt to emerging technologies, including an increasingly cashless society. We also know that these electronic gaming machines are extremely bright and colourful. They draw you in through the ways that they are set up and the way that the games on these machines are set up.

One particular change that this bill brings in that I really, really commend is having a spin rate of a minimum of 3 seconds. The spin rate, currently 2.14 seconds, which is extremely specific, is the amount of time it takes to play one spin on one of these machines. I indulged and did a little bit of research into the psychological and behavioural factors around this particular way of gameplay. The *Journal of Gambling Studies* in 2017 did a review of a lot of different psychological studies, and Harris and Griffiths found that there was a consistent finding across all of those studies that games with faster speeds of play were preferred and rated as more exciting for all gamblers ranging from non-problem to problem gamblers. So having these different changes to gameplay and having that card are really important to make sure that we help those people who are at risk of becoming problem gamblers but also those people who may be showing those signs of problem gambling already.

I understand and I have heard some people's calls for the carded play changes to be rolled out sooner – particularly Tim Costello's comment during the week – but a phased approach with a pilot program, rolling it out statewide at the end of the year, is really important to make sure that all these venues, including some of those smaller venues that I have in my electorate, have time to get it right. Particularly some of these smaller venues have got their pokie machines in the back room, but they are predominantly a pub. I think of the good old Racecourse Hotel on Cottrell Street in Werribee. It is not a pokies venue, but it has got pokies. We need to make sure that we are looking after the people who operate these smaller community clubs and pubs but also make sure that we introduce these and make sure that this works.

We have already done a lot when it comes to this. We have had reforms around making sure gaming is fair, responsible and transparent, including establishing the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, which is the strongest gambling regulator in Australia with enhanced oversight and enforcement powers. One of the really important things, and I think it goes to what the member for Broadmeadows was also talking about earlier, is having those mandatory closure periods. Since 30 August 2024 all hotels and clubs must close gaming areas between 4 am and 10 am to reduce extended gambling sessions. I recall going out to a fire call last year. It was about 5 in the morning and it was a bin on fire in Watton Street – classic. We have all been to a bin fire if you are in the fire services, but what I remember is across the road was the good old Commercial Hotel, which is one of

our local pokies venues. It was 5 o'clock in the morning and there were people in the smokers area near the pokies having a chat to us. They told us some good intel about who did it, although I would rather that intel came from the city council's CCTV rather than a pokies venue at 5 o'clock in the morning. So having these mandatory closure periods is really important to build a bit more of a standard in our community around what is acceptable while still having a place for people who might need that socialisation to go to as well. In concluding my remarks on the bill, I would like to thank the gambling support services that I have locally, including IPC Health.

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (18:58): I am pleased to stand today in support of the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024, which introduces further reforms to minimise gambling harm in our community and across Victoria. Like many in this place, I like to have a bet when I am at the races. I like to tip in to a punters club when I am at the track or just have an interest in a race for a bit of fun, but I know that gambling harm is a significant issue for far too many Victorians. According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies, around 18 per cent of Victorians who gambled or 8 per cent of all Victorians were classified as being at risk of or already experiencing gambling-related problems. When I refer to gambling harm I am not only talking about the loss or damage to a person's financial position, their bank balance or the money they have. Gambling harm does not just impact someone's finances. Gambling harm can impact all aspects of their life. It can have a serious impact on people's relationships with their partner, their families, their friends, their work colleagues. Gambling harm can impact people's work, their housing, their physical and mental health and their wellbeing. The member for Melton talked about people taking their own lives or attempting to as a result of the disastrous impact of gambling.

Gambling is legal in Victoria, and electronic gaming machines are easy to access at local pubs and clubs in my community. Hospitality venues, pubs and clubs hold an important place in Victorian community life, but there is a balance that must be struck.

#### **Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

#### *Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

#### **Yarra Hills Secondary College**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (19:00): (1071) Yarra Hills Secondary College Mount Evelyn campus in my electorate is a fantastic local school, and the students, their families and teachers deserve new facilities and the best possible learning environment. The matter I raise is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide funding to build a modern multipurpose stadium at the school, which would double as a fit-for-purpose shelter-in-place location for the school community in times of emergency. Yarra Hills Secondary College has a plan for this project: an indoor sports stadium with four basketball courts, a gymnasium and a commercial kitchen, as well as a pavilion to service the school's oval. The building would benefit the school greatly for teaching, assemblies, presentations, performances and art shows. I commend Mount Evelyn campus principal Leighton O'Donnell and school principal Darren Trippett and of course all of the Yarra Hills staff for their fantastic advocacy for the school and for this exciting project. The students are wonderful, and I thoroughly enjoy my opportunities to attend their events, including music concerts and art shows. Indeed I have visited Yarra Hills Secondary College Mount Evelyn campus on many occasions and have seen firsthand how these new facilities would benefit the school and the broader community.

While Yarra Hills Mooroolbark campus received some facility upgrades recently, the Mount Evelyn campus students and teachers are still waiting for the upgrades and new infrastructure that they need and deserve. The students and teachers at Yarra Hills Mount Evelyn should not be penalised for the postcode that they live in, yet I am informed that the Mount Evelyn campus of Yarra Hills Secondary College has not received any capital improvement funding for over 20 years. The Labor government

has been in power for most of this time, and for the last 10 years the Andrews–Allan Labor government has penalised schools based on postcode and not sufficiently invested in their own school in Mount Evelyn. Our community appreciates the fabulous efforts of campus principal Leighton O’Donnell and his vision to revitalise this school and attract more students from our local Mount Evelyn community. Upgrading facilities and building this new stadium will help contribute to Yarra Hills Secondary Mount Evelyn having the 21st-century learning spaces that they need, and I know that this project is a major priority for this local school community. I call on the government to provide this much-needed funding for this new multipurpose stadium at Yarra Hills Secondary College in Mount Evelyn.

### Education funding

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (19:02): (1072) My adjournment is directed to the Deputy Premier in his capacity as Minister for Education, and the action I seek is an update on the contributions that are being made to Victorian public schools as part of the new historic agreement that ensures full and fair funding in partnership with the Albanese Labor government. The Allan Labor government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to education in Victoria, from free TAFE and free three- and four-year-old kinder to the \$753 million allocated in our previous budget for maintaining and upgrading schools. Our achievements are numerous and impactful, promising benefits for generations to come. In my electorate I am proud to represent several outstanding public schools. I see firsthand the dedication of staff and teachers, who work tirelessly to educate our future generations. These schools deserve full and fair funding, which is why I am thrilled that our government has a supportive partner in Canberra with the Albanese Labor government, who understand the importance of education. The Albanese Labor government’s announcement that there will be additional funding for the schooling resource standard provided means more individualised support for students, the implementation of evidence-based teaching practices and enhanced mental health supports in schools. I extend my gratitude to the Albanese government for prioritising public education and ensuring that Victoria receives the fair attention and funding it has long deserved.

### Royal Flying Doctor Service

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (19:04): (1073) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is to fund the Royal Flying Doctor Service community transport program beyond 30 June this year. The Royal Flying Doctor Service community transport program offers a vital service to community members aged over 65 to go from home to health appointments.

We know that throughout the Mildura electorate and right across regional and rural Victoria health care can be quite some time away. For those over 65, driving those distances can be quite troublesome. I had the absolute pleasure of running into a driver, Pat, and Mrs Mattschoss, who has been a user of the service in Robinvale for quite some time. I ran into them down the street last week. Mrs Mattschoss is a huge fan of this service. She and her husband use it often. They are elderly, but she is so full of joy when she speaks about this program, because not only of the ability for her and her husband to get to health appointments from Robinvale and Euston to Mildura most of the time, but it is also the social connection. That is what the volunteer drivers also tell me, because this program is completely volunteer led. But it does cost money. Brilliant programs such as this do cost money.

We have heard – and I have raised in this house multiple times this year – that the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme is problematic at the moment with the length of time it takes for applicants to have their forms resolved. It can take now up to eight months. So I am asking for the minister to fund the Royal Flying Doctor Service to the tune of \$2 million. That will keep it going in the 10 communities: Robinvale, Warracknabeal, Cobram, Heathcote, Lakes Entrance, Sale, Numurkah, Foster, Central Gippsland, St Arnaud and Rochester. That \$2 million – which does not seem like a lot – will keep this program going in those 10 communities, which is vital, because without this, people would not get to their healthcare appointments. \$8 million, however, would be able to fund the Royal Flying Doctor Service to take this statewide and allow access for other places where there is still a big gap.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service do an amazing job with this community transport program. The drivers get just as much out of it as the clients do. I urge the Minister for Health to fund this program and give assurance to those involved.

### **Boronia train station**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (19:07): (1074) The Allan Labor government is making the biggest investment in a generation into Boronia by any level of government and I am so, so excited. We are providing a major upgrade of the Boronia station precinct, so the adjournment matter I have is addressed to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update to my community on when the final designs will be released for the upgrade to Boronia station's precinct.

We had the first designs released not too long ago, which showed a new, landscaped plaza which would give direct access moving from Dorset Road through to the station and a brand new line of sight with pedestrian crossings being moved down the road to adjust with that change as well. We have got major upgrades, not just at the platform level but also at concourse level. There are so many parts of this that are going to make this precinct completely unrecognisable, with a new pocket park and open space. We are going to take out the protective services officers and administration from the concourse and we are going to widen that, making that more accessible and easier to get around. This is something that has been voted for well and truly in Boronia. It is very exciting. It has extremely positive feedback from the community in Boronia and across my electorate, and it is going to be an absolute game changer of a project. We know that construction will start this year; completion of this project will be in 2026. I thank the former ministers and everyone who has helped on this project, and of course the current minister, who I know is extremely passionate about this project. I look forward to her response.

### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (19:09): (1075) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me and the Cheltenham, Pennydale and Highett communities to hear what local residents are actually saying about the Allan Labor government's proposed Suburban Rail Loop project.

Earlier this year the minister said that the Labor government's approach to the Suburban Rail Loop was based upon 'priorities that communities have identified'. In late 2023 the government allowed local Cheltenham, Pennydale and Highett residents to provide feedback on the *SRL Precincts: Discussion Paper*. You might ask why they bothered, though, because it is not like Labor to ask the community before they announce a project or to announce exactly what a project looks like.

The 2023 surveys had 198 responses, which were never actually released publicly by the government despite being anonymised. We had to obtain them via freedom of information. I would like to quote a few responses from local residents – and I will make this available to Hansard afterwards:

I think the whole idea is going to destroy Cheltenham.

... the SRL plans as of today would break existing community spirit and the area would become a soulless, overdeveloped suburb that hinders quality of life for people living in suburban Melbourne

... no-one seems to want it except the people planning it.

You want to grow the population in Cheltenham. But if you ask the people in Cheltenham what they want this is not it.

The fact that Highett will lose open space and have to house more residents than the infrastructure can handle is absurd.

This project should be cancelled – the state cannot afford it

It makes no mention of environmental spaces, despite all the evidence that access to green space improves human health. Also, it is dishonest – the discussion paper is just about making the area very high density, with no appropriate increase in support services ...

I have lived in Cheltenham for 23 years and all I have seen with all the new apartments being built is businesses being destroyed, a lot more crime, many empty new offices and commercial spaces.

It's a smoke and mirrors response so the government can get away with ruining the precinct with a concrete jungle.

I live in Cheltenham and I don't trust a Labor Government

I also do not trust the idea that this decade-old Labor government can get this project right. They have barely been promoted locally, and I would be shocked if more than a handful of people actually turn up to the consultations the government has promoted. That is why it is so critical for the minister to actually join me in the communities of Cheltenham, Pennydale and Highett to hear directly from residents about the impact of the SRL on our community.

### **Wendouree electorate LGBTIQ+ community**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (19:12): (1076) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Equality, and I am delighted that she is in the chamber today for me to raise this adjournment matter. The action that I seek is for her to visit my electorate of Wendouree to meet with representatives of our vibrant LGBTIQ+ community at a stakeholder round table. I am a proud ally of the Ballarat rainbow community, and I support trans and gender-diverse people in my electorate and across Ballarat and our state. I was delighted to join with the minister in Daylesford last weekend for the ChillOut parade, marching with a local contingent including members of Rainbow Labor and alongside the federal member for Ballarat the Honourable Catherine King as well as the Minister for Health, who is also the local member. It was a wonderful celebration for our thriving regional LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

I also wish to take this time to acknowledge the work of QHub in my electorate, which is a safe, affirming and inclusive space for young members of the Ballarat rainbow community and their families. QHub is funded by our Labor government and is an LGBTIQ+ youth mental and social connection program delivered in partnership with Drummond Street Services, Queerspace, Wellways and CAFS in central Ballarat. I visited Ballarat QHub last week and met with the team, including Jack, Asha, Alex and AJ, as well as Emily and Wendy from CAFS to learn more about the work they are doing to boost inclusion for our LGBTIQ+ youth across western Victoria. I would welcome the opportunity to host the minister in Ballarat to hear directly from a range of voices and perspectives about local priorities and the government's equality strategy. I look forward to the minister's response and to welcoming her to Ballarat.

### **Housing**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (19:14): (1077) My adjournment this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the government to amend the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities to recognise housing as a human right. In my inaugural speech to this house I said that I simply do not accept that a city and a state and a nation as wealthy as ours should have such high levels of homelessness and housing stress. Six years and one pandemic later it is still completely unacceptable that so many Victorians are denied access to the most basic of human needs – a safe, secure home. This is not so wicked a problem that it cannot be solved. Indeed during the pandemic rough sleeping was completely eliminated. It requires, though, some passion, some vision and a willingness to take the tough decisions to put housing at the forefront of government decision-making.

Make no mistake, Victoria is in a housing crisis. Our community is suffering from unaffordable rents, housing insecurity and homelessness. Tens of thousands have waited years and years for public housing, all while our public housing stock has declined to the lowest levels in the nation. As former Supreme Court judge and Yoorrook commissioner Kevin Bell KC has said, what was once the great Australian dream has now become the great Australian nightmare. Housing instability robs people of their dignity, it robs them of their health, it robs them of opportunity and it robs them of their future. This is both an economic issue and a social one. It is about productivity but also about dignity, security and safety.

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities protects key rights like the right to life, equality before the law and freedom of expression, yet it fails to protect the right to housing, leaving those most in need vulnerable to a system that continues to fail them. It is time for change. That is why this morning I launched a petition calling on the government to amend the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities to include the right to housing. Housing is not and should never be seen as a privilege or as a commodity or as just an investment. It is a human right. Recognising this right in the charter will send a message that every Victorian deserves the stability, security and dignity of a safe home. It will ensure the government prioritises more secure, affordable housing for all and that it has to consider the housing implications of each and every bill brought to this Parliament. The change is simple, but the implications are enormous. Victoria can only be at its best when every Victorian has a place to call home.

#### **Bellarine electorate schools**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (19:17): (1078) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit our incredible Bellarine schools. In the Bellarine we have a number of exciting developments happening across our schools. Barwon Heads Primary School have continued to build upon their phonics program in the classroom this year, implementing the updated Victorian teaching and learning model, with explicit teaching at its core, so the students can achieve their very best and thrive in that classroom. Drysdale Primary School are building an inclusive playground for students of all abilities to play, learn and develop, thanks to some funding from the Capital Works Fund in the 2024–25 round. Bellarine Secondary College were also successful in this funding and are refurbishing their facilities. Last month I visited Wallington Primary School. They have commenced works for the \$2.1 million upgrade of their classrooms and learning spaces. These upgrades will add to the inclusive playground that was built at Wallington Primary School last year. I would be pleased to welcome the minister to visit our Bellarine schools and to see firsthand our government's investment into education.

#### **Kew electorate schools**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (19:18): (1079) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and the action I am seeking is the fair allocation of funding for schools in the electorate of Kew. The electorate of Kew is home to more than 30 schools and education is at the very core of our community, but our local state schools require their fair share of capital funding to be able to provide the education that our community deserves and expects. Before every budget handed down by this government since I was elected I have advocated for this funding. However, each time there has been no new capital funding allocated to a single school in Kew, Kew East, Balwyn, Balwyn North or parts of Canterbury, Mont Albert and Surrey Hills. Time and time again, the Allan Labor government has failed to deliver for my local community.

Meanwhile we hear the news that this Labor government has overseen taxpayers money being paid to organised crime through dealings with the CFMEU. We hear of bikies earning up to \$10,000 a week for fake jobs on the Big Build. We hear of horrific violence against women linked to government worksites. Labor has prioritised using taxpayers money to fund cover-ups, union thuggery and organised crime at the expense of essential services. This corruption and waste cannot continue. It is Victorians who pay the price.

It has been 80 years since Kew East Primary School has received any significant state funding for capital works, and the school desperately needs an urgent upgrade. I ask that the government commit \$6.5 million to replace the outdated buildings and build eight new permanent classrooms, a staff room and an office area.

Canterbury Girls Secondary College has had no substantive investment in its facility in decades and is seeking urgent upgrades. Back in 2021 there was an incident at the school where a wall collapsed, sending bricks and glass crashing to the floor. Luckily, no-one was hurt as students were in class at the time, but the school had more than 100 staff and 1000 students onsite. This is an unacceptable risk

to students and teachers. We committed to investing in Canterbury Girls – \$12.2 million to prepare and deliver a new master plan for its campus. The school facilities are dated and impractical, with spaces such as the science and art classrooms no longer supporting the needs of both students and teachers. I call on the minister to step up and provide this much-needed funding.

Balwyn Primary School is a thriving local primary school with consistently strong NAPLAN results. However, enrolments have nearly doubled since 2011 and facilities have not been upgraded to reflect the significantly increased numbers. I call on the government to commit \$6.1 million for the development of a school master plan and upgrades, including new classrooms, toilet facilities, staff facilities and sick bay facilities. From working with local school representatives and parents, I know that this investment is desperately needed.

I call on the government to fund Kew High School. I call on the government to make sure that Chatham Primary School has the next phase of its works actually delivered. I call on the minister to get his priorities right and commit to fair funding for the students who attend these state schools in the electorate of Kew.

### Community safety

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (19:21): (1080) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The action I seek is an update on what the Victorian government is doing to combat Islamophobia in Kororoit and across the state. Islamophobia remains a pressing concern, impacting the safety, wellbeing and sense of belonging for many in our community. In Kororoit we are proud of our diversity and our commitment to inclusivity. It is imperative that we continue working together to ensure that every Victorian, regardless of faith, feels safe, respected and valued.

Last week I had the privilege of co-hosting my second annual iftar dinner in Kororoit during Ramadan, with the Qaim Foundation. We heard from children sharing poetry and describing in their own words what Ramadan means to them. Among the young voices that graced the evening were Zain Ali and Umair Abbas, whose heartfelt words captured the essence of faith, self-reflection and community spirit. Their poetry was moving testament to the values of Ramadan – compassion, generosity and unity. It was genuinely inspiring to witness our young leaders expressing themselves and being so passionate about their faith. We were also fortunate to hear from resident scholar Maulana Wajid Hussain Mehdavi, who shared his wisdom and insights on the importance of community and faith. His words served as a reminder that fostering understanding and respect among different faiths is a shared responsibility which we all hold. I was joined by my parliamentary colleagues Steve McGhie and Kathleen Matthews-Ward as well as federal member Sam Rae. Together we witnessed firsthand the incredible work of the Qaim Foundation and what they do to strengthen the community. This event was not just about breaking fast; it was about building relationships, learning from one another and reinforcing the values of inclusivity and of course respect.

I want to take a moment to sincerely thank the outgoing president of the Qaim Foundation, who started this annual event, Rehan, for his dedication and the remarkable work he has done and continues to do for the foundation. His leadership has been instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging and unity in our community. I also extend a warm welcome to the incoming president Intizar Hussain. I look forward to continuing the strong relationship with him and the rest of the committee. This event was a testament to the power of interfaith dialogue, as members of various faiths from across Kororoit came together, not only to learn about Ramadan but to build connections and foster mutual understanding and respect for each other. It is through these shared experiences that we can strengthen our bonds and ensure that Kororoit and Victoria remain places of harmony, respect and inclusivity.

To the members of the Qaim Foundation, thank you once again for your generosity and for welcoming us into your community to break fast together. Your hospitality and commitment to unity are truly appreciated. I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone not only in Kororoit but across our great state Ramadan Mubarak.

**Responses**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:24): I thank the member for Wendouree for inviting me to visit local representatives of the rainbow community in her electorate. I want to thank her for this very kind invitation and also acknowledge and thank her for her allyship and her support of rainbow community members in Ballarat. I love going to Ballarat. It is a wonderful community, and I know it is a community that she is extremely proud of. I look forward very much to meeting with her and other community members in the near future.

Among other matters tonight, the member for Evelyn had a matter for the Minister for Education. She wanted the provision of a multipurpose stadium for the Yarra Hills Mount Evelyn campus in her electorate. The member for Mulgrave called on the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, and she sought an update on the recent federal agreement with the Albanese government that brings increased and equitable funding for our schools. The member for Mildura had a matter for the Minister for Health, and she is seeking the ongoing funding of the Royal Flying Doctor community transport service beyond 30 June this year.

The member for Bayswater had a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, seeking an update on the final designs for the upgrade of the Boronia station precinct. The member for Sandringham had a matter for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and is seeking to have a meeting with local communities regarding the minister hearing the view of locals on the Suburban Rail Loop. The member for Ringwood had an adjournment matter which was directed to the Premier, seeking for the government to alter the Victorian Charter of Human Rights to include the right to housing. The member for Bellarine had a matter for the Minister for Education, seeking that the minister visit the incredible schools in the Bellarine electorate. The member for Kew had a matter for the Minister for Education, and the member is seeking a fair allocation of funds for the schools in her Kew electorate. And the member for Kororoit had a matter for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and is asking the minister for an update on how the Allan Labor government is helping to keep Muslims safe in her community.

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

**House adjourned 7:26 pm.**